



**London  
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University

**Evaluating beyond the metrics:  
understanding the value of participatory arts  
through plurality of voice**

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the potentialities of holistic and participant-centric approaches to evaluating the social impact of participatory arts programmes. The current framing of the social impact of the arts is problematised through exploration of existing discourse, before interrogating principles and methods from ethnographic and reflexive research, drawing upon Freirean pedagogy and constructivist approaches to knowledge generation. I consider how the binary of top-down instrumentalised evaluation frameworks and bottom-up approaches can be disrupted, to build a stronger knowledge base of social impact of participatory arts engagement. Through a critical case study of Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's work with young people, with a focus on its START programme for participants not in education, employment or training, this thesis invites participants to be the knowledge holders and changemakers of their lives. Through the exploration of pluralistic experience and emerging outcomes, I move towards defining impact, and placing ownership of change with participants, as a result of participation. My research contributes to the current discourse on the evidence base and value of participation in the arts and to emerging evaluation methodologies. The findings which emerge through this research, humanise and celebrate both the individual and collective experience. Finally, this thesis proposes a new conceptual framework for evaluating the impact of participatory arts programmes and understanding change, underpinned by friendship, with-ness, and hope.

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## List of abbreviations and key terms

### *Abbreviations*

ACE – Arts Council England  
DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
Lyric – Lyric Hammersmith Theatre  
LBHF- London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham  
LCEP- Local Cultural Education Partnership  
LSBU- London South Bank University  
NPO- National Portfolio Organisation  
RFW- Rueben Foundation Wing

### *Key terms*

Agency  
Accountability  
Cultural Shift  
Emerging Outcomes  
Evaluation  
Friendship  
Holistic  
Hope  
Humanisation  
Marginalised  
Ownership  
Participant-Centric  
Participatory Arts  
Plurality  
Reflective  
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Social Impact  
Underrepresented  
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With-ness

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## Use of Pseudonyms

The young people who took part in this research are referred to by pseudonyms to preserve anonymity. When giving consent for the inclusion of their data (interviews, observations, group discussions and written feedback), some agreed to their names being used and others preferred use of pseudonyms. After much deliberation, I decided to use pseudonyms throughout to encourage plurality of voice, without drawing attention to specific young people by use of their given names, where a reader connected to the research would make associations to some but not all research participants.

I have actively sought to keep the integrity of participant voice with inclusion of their feedback as verbatim. This includes the pauses, the restating of ideas, the 'umms' and grammatical choices. This presents their ideas as they said and understood them in the moment, not reframed through my subjective lens.

I have selected to include the names of key members of Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's staff by name when developing the wider picture of organisational structure and information within the public domain. When discussing particulars of participant voice, in connection to specific staff members and freelance practitioners, I have used generalised terms including Young Lyric Team member; START team member; or similar, to avoid placing individual team members as the subject of discussion.



## Introductions

This thesis problematises current approaches to understanding social impacts of participatory arts programmes and investigates the possibilities of holistic and participant-centric<sup>1</sup> approaches to uncovering emergent outcomes, placing participants as knowledge holders and changemakers. Participatory arts practitioners and organisations regularly face calls to produce a more robust evidence base of social impact and are continually caught between top-down, instrumentalised evaluation frameworks to validate programming and impacts, and bottom-up approaches to understand the value of engagement, outcomes, and successes of their own practices.

Recent initiatives to create standardised evaluative approaches that provide an aligned body of evidence rely heavily on predetermined outcomes as benchmarks of impact. Matarasso's 1997 report, *Use or Ornamentation?* is often reported as providing the foundation for this evidence base, confirming over one hundred benefits of taking part in participatory arts projects, importantly highlighting: that participation in participatory arts yields social benefits; participants have unique experiences of taking part, bringing with them their own personal schema; the relationships built through participation are more significant than the artform explored; the resulting social impacts are not always positive; and the social impacts are demonstrable (Matarasso, 2019, p. 161). This knowledge base exists and therefore the need to 'prove' this for each participatory arts project is redundant. I suggest that rather than continually confirming this knowledge base, focus be placed on extending, deepening and challenging it whilst accounting for the changing socio-political climate in which programming exists. Participatory arts practitioners and organisations regularly implement evaluation and impact studies due to the demands of securing and sustaining funding, yet the reductive strategies used to achieve the continued churn need not dampen the understanding of impacts and achievements through the simplification and categorisation of participant experience. Within the field of participatory arts, such approaches provide a mere glimpse into the varied, complex, and nuanced outcomes and impacts emerging at the individual, group, and organisational level. I assert the development of a stronger evidence base, therefore, comes not from the quantity of individual reports produced on the superficial level to meet the desires of funders and promotional materials, but from strengthened holistic forms of evaluation that invite plurality of voice and reflexive engagement. If the focus shifts from confirming the existing knowledge base to encouraging new knowledge and perspectives that welcome honesty and reflection on failure as well as achievement, we may begin to create a living and changing understanding of the impact of

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<sup>1</sup> I define 'participant-centric' as allowing opportunity and freedom for participants to experience, learn and reflect as individuals. Within evaluation, I suggest a participant-centric approach uses tools that engage participants in the evaluation process and welcomes their voice.

participatory arts. Furthermore, if knowledge generation and sharing is a focus, practitioners and organisations will be provided with opportunity to engage in reflexivity and building stronger future programming.

I use the term participatory arts throughout this thesis to describe a wide variety of arts encounters taking place *with* participants. Participatory art is a loose term that encompasses many artforms and ways of working. Its usage is nuanced, sometimes connected to the invitation of an audience to join in a given art experience and other times, more rooted in generating dialogue and social activism through artistic expression that encourages shared ownership and decision-making. I apply Matarasso's definition of participatory art: 'the creation of art by professional artists and non-professional artists' (2019, p. 48). He highlights two commonalities amongst all participatory arts work:

- 1) Participatory art must include the *creation of art* and a 'framework of values, ideas and references, the application of knowledge and craft, a duration in time, and some form of presentation' (p. 48). Working collaboratively, professional and non-professional artists create a work of art. The resulting 'work' may be of varied quality and received differently by its intended audiences. It importantly results in a sharing of work, as without working towards a given output, the process undertaken sits more within social development or art education.
- 2) Participatory art recognises that 'everyone involved in the artistic act is an artist' (p. 49). Matarasso notes that this idea is not always verbalised or accepted, suggesting more common usage of 'participants', 'non-artists' and 'young people at risk of offending' rather than bestowing individuals with the label 'artist'. In creating a non-hierarchical system wherein 'non-artists' and 'professional artists' come together to create collectively, I welcome the use of 'artists' as a term.<sup>2</sup>

Use of the term participatory arts is intentional for this thesis. Participatory arts is an umbrella term, encompassing work with varied communities, delivered by professional artists including work in arts in health, applied theatre, community art, socially engaged art programmes, and others. Whilst the case study set out in this thesis fits within an applied theatre context, the discussions and findings

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<sup>2</sup> I suggest that the term 'artists' be used when describing those taking part within a given participatory arts project, especially from within the delivering organisation. I have not done so within this thesis for two reasons: 1) it is not common practice within Lyric's current structure: Lyric refers to those taking part as 'participants', 'young people', 'NEET young people' or 'marginalised young people'; 2) I wished to place value and ownership of ideas to individuals, naming them (by pseudonym). I have noted need to consider 'participants' as 'artists' within the final chapter.

presented are not limited to applied theatre work. Indeed, widening the scope to participatory arts allows for new vantage points in considering the case study with Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and their work with young people, befitting its aims and vision. Lastly, I use participatory arts to situate the case study, making a distinction between arts education in its traditional form (via school and qualification-based training) and alternative forms of experiential learning that challenge hegemonic framings of social emancipation. Through the emergence of new types of knowledge from participatory arts programmes, I suggest there is potential for new knowledge to contribute to social change.

Using START, Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's six-week drama-based programme for underrepresented young people not in education, employment, or training as a case study, I interrogate these tensions, problematics, and possibilities: from the organisational framing of the programme and expected outcomes, wider discourse on arts evaluations and impact; to participant experience, learning, and reflections. I connect analysis of participant experience to wider organisational learning, suggesting a reflexive practice on the individual and organisational level can strengthen future programming and impact for participants. It is my assertion that in challenging the modernistic models of evaluation through exploration of constructivist and systemic discourses, a refined model of understanding and discussion of impact can emerge, placing participant as owner and producer of knowledge triangulated by other stakeholders. I use this notion to challenge existing structures and overuse of wide-reaching expectations of 'transformation' through participatory arts programming. This research challenges the necessity to fulfil socio-political objectives through the didactic and reductive techniques to acquire quantitative indicators, without accounting for participants' experiences, their personal schema, and importantly, in collaboration *with* participants.

Within the participatory arts, organisations use multiple terms to describe the group of participants they engage with. I use the terms, underrepresented or marginalised when discussing participants taking part in Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's START programme. I draw on Creative Future's definition of underrepresented people: referring to people who are insufficiently and inadequately represented because of who they are: people from Black, Asian, mixed heritage, traveller or other global majority backgrounds; people from the LGBTQIA+ community; people with disabilities (physical, sensory and learning disabilities, mental health issues and neurodivergence); people with substance misuse issues; survivors; and people from working class backgrounds (2023). I actively work against description of people as disadvantaged or vulnerable within this thesis, as the terms

place the onus or blame on the participant, whereas use of underrepresented or marginalised as terms, place the onus on society and exclusion of people.

### Research aims and guiding questions

The aims of this research are threefold: to situate participatory arts within current discourse of the social impact of the creative and cultural sector; to problematise evaluative approaches and consider social impacts of participatory arts programmes using Lyric's START programme as a case study; and to provide possibilities for reimagined evaluative approaches through a conceptual holistic evaluative framework for participatory arts, working from a place of with-ness, friendship, and hope. Through use of my case study, I explore how generative discussions with participants provides richness and depth to understanding impact, triangulated by other stakeholder perspectives, providing plurality of perspective, voice, and experience. I posit through dialogue with participants a more active and meaningful evaluation of impact emerges and acts as a site for further participant reflection and agency. I consider collection of evaluative data and the summation of findings to be part of an ongoing process of reflexive practice at participant, organisational and sector level. Lastly, I suggest the existing knowledge base of participatory arts impact can be strengthened through enhanced understanding of the mechanisms of change, for individuals and organisations.

To frame this enquiry the following questions are considered:

- How do historical underpinnings of the value of arts and social impact permeate the current ethos, evaluation process, and reporting of participatory arts programmes?
- What are the tensions between funder, organisational, and participant expectations of social impact? Furthermore, how does organisational understanding of participant experience and impact and participant understanding of their own experience align and differ?
- What possibilities emerge when agency and ownership of experience is placed with participants to drive the narrative of change, rather than starting with organisational perspectives of change in connection to predetermined outcomes? How can causation, correlation, and ownership of experience contribute and distract from participant narratives?

### Contextual underpinnings

#### Collaborative PhD

It is important to acknowledge the impetus for this research and its subsequent refinement. The research was funded by London South Bank University (LSBU) and Lyric Hammersmith Theatre<sup>3</sup> as a

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<sup>3</sup> For brevity, I refer to Lyric Hammersmith Theatre as Lyric throughout.

collaborative PhD studentship. LSBU had recently developed a Masters in creative performance practice and partnered with the Lyric for intensive modules on directing and socially engaged theatre, providing students with experiential learning from leading industry professionals. In addition to this partnership, they developed a Collaborative PhD brief based on the needs of Lyric's Young People's Programme. I responded to the research brief, 'Investing in the next generation: evaluating the impact of Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's Young People's Programmes' and was awarded the studentship. As a Collaborative PhD, it was expected that I would be present at the Lyric a few days a week working towards an agreed output which would then be phased down as I approached the end of my research. I began with a focus on developing a conceptual framework for evaluating the impact across Lyric's work with young people considering: how and why Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's participatory programmes impact the personal and social development of participants; and how Lyric's methodology may differ from other participatory arts programmes. Over the research period, this focus shifted and responded to the changing climate and priorities of Lyric.

### Subjectivity and positionality

It is important to acknowledge researcher power and privilege in any research context. I was acutely aware of the need to place myself within the research whilst also bringing awareness to the multiplicity of voices I encountered, especially with the young people I engaged with. Throughout the research process, I worked within a reflexive framework, aiming to make transparent my positionalities and subjectivities. Berry (2015) suggests researchers provide personal contextualisation to situate what Gee refers to as the 'frame problem' (2004). The 'frame problem' acknowledges that we all interpret what we hear and read within the context it was said, yet we cannot fully absorb all nuances, so we draw inferences based on judgement. Kelsky offers a more direct consideration, that 'White ethnographers account for their own "nativeness" in their practice of representation' (2001, p. 429). The weight of the 'frame problem' and acknowledgement that I could easily misrepresent participants, especially those from different demographic backgrounds to my own, from my own framing was a constant consideration. Indeed, this consideration underpinned my thinking around how collated data is used at organisational level and by funders to discuss impact: Are participants' reflections and outcomes treated with care and integrity? What personal information (demographic and personal circumstances) is integral to the constructed narratives in evaluation? When does sharing of information exacerbate power imbalances, placing the organisational or funder agenda above participants' individual growth? I provide the following

statement of self to contextualise my personal schema and acknowledge my own positionality and subjectivities:

*I am a 40-something-year-old, white American woman from a middle-class background. I am a heterosexual, married person with two daughters. We own our home in a Bedfordshire village within commuting distance to London. I have lived in the UK for 20 years and hold dual citizenship. I acknowledge that I hold a privileged position because of my cultural, societal, and educational background, and with this privilege, comes power. My self-schema has been influenced by my educational and previous employment opportunities and I, therefore, bring a level of experience and expertise to the field in which I am researching. I undertook drama training before completing an MA in applied theatre with a focus on working with marginalised communities, and a further MA in museum and gallery education. I have worked as a theatre practitioner, director, teacher and project manager. For five years I ran a youth theatre programme for young people from across London to collaborate, devising their own performances based on a preselected stimulus. All of these experiences provide me with a wealth of knowledge and experience in the field, but also bring with them biased opinions. I further recognise that the young people taking part in this research have unique lived experiences, hold different frames of reference, different backgrounds and bring with them individual assumptions and preconceptions. My positionality affords me opportunity, yet I do acknowledge barriers to my knowledge base.*

This thesis acknowledges the many roles I took on throughout this research project, from fieldwork and freelance work at Lyric and in other creative and cultural organisations. These opportunities allowed me greater depth of knowledge but also highlights the subjectivity of my role as researcher which needed careful consideration within my writing. I, therefore, situate my voice and subjectivity within the discussion, whilst allowing the voices of others to resonate.

### Changing landscapes

There have been dramatic changes in the social, political, and economic landscape across the research period of this thesis (2018-2022). As research commenced in 2018, I pondered the precarious futures of arts and cultural funding in the UK, with looming Brexit implications and expected impacts to many streams of funding within the creative and cultural sector. This concern was soon replaced by the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts, not only in the creative and cultural sector, but permeating all aspects of our individual and collective lives. The challenges during the prolonged closure of schools, arts and cultural centres, as well as the fractured abilities to congregate and engage in meaningful activities with others had a profound impact on many young

people whom I had the privilege of meeting across the research period. Furthermore, the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 by a serving police officer acted as yet another reminder of the great challenges society faces in tackling systemic racism across the globe. In 2021, as the UK emerged from the majority of Covid-19 restrictions, the creative and cultural sector had to think creatively about how to invite and encourage people back into its buildings and programmes. The 'return to normal' was illusive, as navigating the world in a post-Covid recovery phase proved more difficult for some people. There were notable changes in how people wish to engage with society, learning and working environments. Working from home proved productive and beneficial for many who desired to move towards blended models of working post-Covid, whereas others struggled with the lack of face-to-face communication and dedicated differentiation between home and work life. Similarly, data collected from young people for other projects I was engaged in voiced strong opinions on how they wished to learn and engage with varied activities, with many suggesting 'courses' weren't attractive, whereas one-off sessions, master classes and drop-in sessions were more manageable with changing priorities.

Whilst Covid-19 can be seen as a shared moment in time, connecting all people having lived through such a phenomenon, it has also demonstrated the great divides within our society, highlighting multitudes of inequalities. These momentous events, coupled with crises connected to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, change within the UK's political leadership, and the pressures of the UK's cost-of-living crisis, all inform and shape how young people view and interpret the world around them. Arts practice continues to reflect, interpret, and challenge our perceptions of the tumultuous times we are witnessing but also living. Similarly, it is the role of participatory arts to encourage participants to explore and interpret the world around them, challenge fixed ideas and imagine collective positive futures. This thesis is positioned from within the current landscape and desire to inform understanding of participatory arts impacts.

## Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis follows the chronology of the research process and is divided into three parts. Part One establishes wider viewings of the creative and cultural sector and their impacts and puts forward the research methodology. Chapter 1 develops foundational discussions of economic and social impact of the creative and cultural sector in the UK and changing perceptions of the value of the arts, especially within the UK's education system. Selected examples of empirical and conceptual impact studies in the arts from fields of arts education, arts and health, arts and social justice, and youth theatre are used to highlight the existing knowledge base and gaps within this

base. Chapter 2 interrogates current evaluative approaches and frameworks used within the creative and cultural industries to gather, analyse, and frame social impact in the arts. I highlight the benefits of these frameworks and also address the problems they present from the simplification of outcomes through overuse of metrics, generalised meaning-making that supports organisational and/or funder narrative, and the reduction of engagement and experience, to collective findings or via a selected individual's journey. Examples of impact frameworks used within participatory arts programmes to elicit new knowledge are explored; from traditional paradigms as well as those that sit on the fringes, applying arts-based and participatory models to address social impact. Chapter 3 concludes Part One, where I put forward the mixed-method methodology applied for this research, presented as a social inquiry through ethnographic and reflexive research. I employ a range of complementing theories to challenge existing forms of evaluation and knowledge sharing.

Part Two takes the form of a critical case study, drawing on field research with Lyric. In Chapter 4, I situate Lyric within London's creative and cultural sector as both a producing theatre and centre for creative engagement. I put forward an overview of its responsibilities as an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, its financial portfolio and staff structure. Chapter 5 then provides an in-depth review of Lyric's work with young people in West London, with a specific focus on its START programme for young people not in education, employment or training. I highlight shifting social, political, and educational priorities in the UK, making connections to organisational changes in objectives, funding, and leadership, to create a well-rounded account of how Lyric's long-standing programme, START has responded to these shifts. Chapter 6 interrogates the experience and impact of Lyric's START programme with and for underrepresented young people through ethnographic and organisational observations and researcher reflections. I introduce the notion of plurality of voice and the need for agnostic consensus in impact evaluation. This line of enquiry continues into Chapter 7, where I foreground the experiences and reflections of START participants, triangulated by researcher observation, written feedback and other stakeholder observations. Part 2 concludes with Chapter 8 which addresses power dynamics within START, its stakeholders and use of evaluative data through a radical redefining of knowledge ownership and accountability. I explore tensions of the funder/organisation relationship and the 'use' of participant voice to validate these relationships.

Part 3 concludes this thesis with synthesis of learning across Parts 1 and 2 and puts forward a conceptual holistic framework for evaluation of participatory arts programmes. Chapter 9 summarises key changes that must be considered to create a more participant-centric evaluation process; and illuminates how theories of hope, friendship and with-ness can be applied not only to



the ethos and delivery of participatory arts but to the evaluation as well. Part 3 concludes with provocations for further inquiry into what I refer to as a hopeful and compassionate approach to evaluation and sharing of knowledge.

Throughout this thesis, I layer participant experience, organisational agenda and understanding, and the sharing of findings to demonstrate the complexity of knowledge generation and understanding of social impacts whilst acknowledging the societal expectations placed upon participants. The framing considers multiple strategies that explore the subjectivity of experience and voice. In this complex ontological view, I suggest social structures do not determine individual subjectivity, but constrain it in remarkably intricate ways. My fieldwork is situated within the historical information made available on previous iterations of the programme, the wider applied theatre and participatory arts movements and considers the participation of further young people that took part after the prescribed fieldwork. The first observations took place in February 2019, with interviews in April 2019, followed by another two iterations of the project in summer and autumn 2019. These projects and outcomes fall pre-covid, with one further project occurring as the theatre was able to reopen in 2021.

## Part 1: The existing knowledge base

### Chapter 1: The economic and social impacts of the creative and cultural sector

The benefits and impact of the arts and culture have been intensely debated amongst scholars, policymakers, arts practitioners, and funders. This chapter addresses the historical and current debates and discourse on the economic and social impact of the creative and cultural sector, with a focus on participation within the arts, rather than the viewing of art. Within this chapter, I draw upon literature investigating the economic and social impacts of the creative and cultural sector<sup>4</sup> in its widest terms. It is not possible to complete a comprehensive account of available research on the impact of the arts within this literature review, due to its far-reaching scope. Conversely, my research has also revealed a lack of literature in particular areas, such as social impacts of theatre-based programmes. The chapter commences with discussion on the origins of economic impacts of the arts; followed by the social impacts of the arts; connection to UK's arts and culture policy, empirical and conceptual studies of social impacts; and ends with a focus on specific fields of arts engagement where studies are more readily available including, arts education, arts in health, and arts and criminal justice. The literature review includes published studies and books, journal articles, arts and culture policy as well as strategy documents. Most of the literature is post-1980, with exception of key historical information and reference to theoretical foundations. Sources connected to the creative and cultural industries are predominantly published within the UK. Literature exploring evaluation of the arts, underpinning theory and connection to applied theatre ways of working draw more widely from Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand.

#### Origins of economic impact

*The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* (Myerscough et al., 1988) is considered the first study to put the impact of arts into the policymaking arena, moving away from 'art for art's sake' developing a wider view of the creative and cultural sector as adding economic value to the UK, employing around 500,000 people with a £10 bn turnover (Reeves, 2002, p. 11). Myerscough demonstrated 'that direct spending on the arts led to spending in other sectors of the economy, which in turn enhanced wealth and job creation, and made cities appear more attractive to citizens and companies' (2002, p. 12). Myerscough's study acted as catalyst for further research on measurements and how to prove economic impact within the sector such as Pratt's (1997) study on

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<sup>4</sup> Within recent reporting the term 'creative industries' is used to describe the 'creative and cultural sector' or 'the arts'. The use of 'creative industries' include the performing arts, visual arts, design, music, literature, fashion, craft, film, TV, radio, computer games and more.

trade within the cultural industries which demonstrated a strong connection with local economies and advised of the difficulties in measuring economic impact due to the multifaceted nature of the industry and lack of specific census and trade classifications. Madden (2001) suggests such studies are unable to fully demonstrate the scope of employment opportunities created by the creative industries, nor the full extent of economic growth and development that should be attributed to them. The impartiality of economic studies is argued by Madden (2001) and Belfiore (2003), both citing how such studies are often commissioned by funders of the arts and delivering organisations, resulting in some useful findings; yet their primary use seems to be as advocacy tools.

Indeed, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw further advocacy for the economic potential of arts and culture. In 1997, the Department of National Heritage (formed in 1992) was repurposed as the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS). DCMS produced two early reports (1998; 2001) aimed at mapping the contributions, threats, and opportunities the creative industries brought to the UK. These reports confirmed the viability of arts and culture as providing investment and employment and were used as a benchmark of the economic potential of the creative industries. Such measures were critiqued by Galloway and Dunlop (2007), suggesting economic potential of the creative industries cannot be measured without connection to the long-term benefits of the creative industries on individuals, society, creativity, creative outputs, *and* the economy. These long-term benefits continued to be difficult to quantify, with varied approaches applied.

Moving forward to the UK government's 2017 commission, *Independent Review of the Creative Industries* (Bazalgette), the economic impact is prominent and its placement instrumental to the UK economy. The report suggests that in 2016, the creative industries contributed nearly £92bn to the UK economy and was growing faster than all other sectors. The government recognised this contribution with the then Culture Secretary, Karen Bradley, commenting '[t]he UK's Creative Industries are an economic powerhouse and the government is committed to removing the barriers to its growth (DCMS, 2017). Bazalgette's review aimed to discover 'how the UK's Creative Industries can help underpin our future prosperity, focused on developing new technology, capitalising on intellectual property rights and growing talent pipelines' (p. 5). The review included a focus on securing new pathways into the creative industries, with the development of 'a new careers 'attraction strategy' including a communications campaign, supporting online advice and information centres, and curriculum materials to broaden and deepen the talent pipeline that starts at school' (p. 10). The review begins to bridge the discussion between the social, personal and economic impacts of the sector, especially when focused on education and young people.

Contributing factors restricting young people's access into the creative industries were cited as both social and informational: highlighting the availability of post-secondary education training; and 'poor understanding amongst pupils, teachers and parents of the kinds of careers that are available, with a perception amongst many that jobs are poorly paid, insecure or not open to those without existing links to the industry' (Bazalgette, 2017, p. 43). Furthermore, Bazalgette suggests the challenges 'begin in schools, with a lack of understanding of the opportunities in the sector and a lack of visible role models', a key issue echoed in the Partnership for Young London and Roundhouse's report on entry into the industry (2019).

Paradoxically, the government's desire to 'grow the talent pipeline' for economic reasons and Bazalgette's recommendations, sit uncomfortably alongside the government's systematic dismantling of creativity within the classroom and reduction of an arts offer in primary and secondary schools. Continued decline in budget allocation towards arts-based subjects and curriculum changes have seen dwindling numbers of young people taking up arts subjects at GCSE and A-levels, exacerbated by the government's introduction of the English Baccalaureate or 'EBacc' in 2010. The EBacc requires students to study five core academic subjects at GCSE level: English language and literature, maths, the sciences, geography or history, and a language. The government's goal was to 'see 75% of pupils studying the EBacc subject combination at GCSE by 2022, and 90% by 2025' (Department for Education, 2019). The creative arts, whilst still on the curriculum in 2023, are not seen as part of 'core' learning, borne from the government's concern that young people's progress was being hindered by selection of what is perceived as less academic GCSE subjects, especially amongst students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The existing evidence base highlighting the benefits of engagement in the arts to students' personal growth, social cohesion, and development of skills that support learning in the academic classroom (e.g. teamwork, communication skills, confidence and creative strategies) was ignored, bringing into question the government's continued assertion of decision-making based on evidence (Ashton and Ashton, 2022, p. 4). Whilst the opportunity to pursue arts subjects, in addition to the five core subjects is allowed, a decline in uptake in these courses and subsequent resources made available to deliver them was seen. Using data from the government's 'Taking Part Survey', Ashton and Ashton note 'a drop in participation of 47% for theatre and drama and 36% for music over the last 10 years, with the poorest children most likely to experience this loss,' and a decrease of 420 drama and music teachers, juxtaposed by an increase of 4,561 in EBacc subjects (2022, p. 4). Furthermore, Ofqual suggests the number of students taking on arts-based GCSEs has declined by 37% over ten years, between 2010 and 2020 (2022, p. 5). Nick Gibb, Schools Minister in 2017 argued that a correlation

between the introduction of EBacc and decreasing numbers of students taking arts GCSEs was not to be found, asserting the EBacc was not ‘driving the arts out of education’, rather that it was ‘deliberately restricted to 5 subject areas to ensure that pupils could take the EBacc and still pursue a number of other subjects, including arts subjects’ (Gibb, 2017). Gibb suggests, ‘The government is committed to ensuring that high-quality arts education is the entitlement of every single child’ (2017). Such positioning has been highly contended by educators, creatives, and others. This includes prominent UK artists Tracey Emin, Grayson Perry, and Antony Gormley who collectively penned a letter, published by the Guardian, expressing their concerns about the exclusion of the arts from the EBacc, suggesting ‘[y]oung people are being deprived of opportunities for personal development in the fields of self-expression, sociability, imagination and creativity’ (2018). The highly regarded artists called on the government to value the arts as much as other subjects, contending a ‘broad and balanced’ education will contribute to continued growth of the creative industries. This need for a ‘broad and balanced’ education has been challenged repeatedly in the last fifteen years, demonstrating both the social and economic impacts of the arts.

Twelve years on since the move towards the EBacc education system, its ability to improve the social mobility of young people continues to be questioned (Lloyd, 2022). Looking at a wider European context, Ashton and Ashton suggest that where many European countries embed arts education and allow culture to play an active role within the education system, the same value for the arts does not exist in England, having continued to marginalise its importance within schools, leading to inequalities from ‘an ideological positioning of the arts and culture that is enacted through not only cultural policy but significantly through educational policy (2022, p. 12). Indeed, whilst the economic value of the creative sector seems to be welcomed by the UK, the social impacts and need for solid foundations for skill development in creative subjects is seemingly not yet understood or valued, although some efforts towards development of skill and entry into the workforce have been made.

The government’s ‘Creative Industries Sector Deal’, produced after Bazalgette’s report, set a mission of ‘making Britain the best place in the world for the creative industries to thrive’, investing £150m jointly by government and industry, delivering on many of Bazalgette’s recommendations (DCMS, 2018). Belfiore (2020) acknowledges that cultural value has become integral to policy debates, but points to a disconnect between government’s value of and understanding of the arts versus its championing of the creative industries as holding great economic value. Taking a similar stance, the Roundhouse’s report, using focus groups and interviews with young people, suggests the value and understanding of the arts are confused at the personal and familial level with negative perceptions

of careers in the creative industries (2019). Providing opportunities for children and young people to learn about the creative industries within the school setting features within the 'Creative Industries Sector Deal' and is complemented by initiatives aimed at increasing learning through the arts, such as Arts Council England's (ACE) 'Cultural Education Challenge' and 'Local Cultural Education Partnerships'(LCEP). The initiatives aim to bring arts and cultural organisations together with educational institutions to share a creative and cultural offer, bringing children and young people opportunities to explore creativity through participation and experience. As with many initiatives, after five years, the funding stream has now closed, placing the onus on partnerships to find ways of continuing to engage with the education sector. The success of these initiatives is currently under review, as funding for the latter ended in 2022.

Further initiatives to 'grow the talent pipeline' are currently underway, with tremendous growth in the past five years, particularly in the post-Covid recovery phase, with creative and cultural organisations across the UK offering a variety of opportunities for young people to develop their skills and expand their understanding of the sector. Work experience programmes, internships, apprenticeships, training opportunities, and mentoring are becoming embedded within many creative and cultural organisations. Although sharing of successes in these areas are becoming more commonplace, enhanced sharing of best practice and discourse on how to reach into the community and how to provide underrepresented young people sustained opportunities that they may not have had before is needed. I suggest there is also a need for further consideration of holistic models of engagement, supporting the whole person into work, rather than a focus on the specific skills to complete the role. The government's Kickstart grants in 2020/21 also allowed many creative employers opportunity to employ a young person, looking to gain access in a particular field, by subsidising salary and on-costs. Providing accessible entry into the creative industries has become a strong objective of arts and cultural strategies. Lambeth Council's ELEVATE (2022) initiative is a stellar example of commitment to the young people in the borough, providing £400k+ over two years (2022-2024) to creative and cultural organisations in the borough to design and deliver paid internships, work placements, and work taster sessions. As the initiative is newly formed, its impacts are unknown, yet its aim is to provide ample skill development, mentoring, and guidance to support young people into their next phase of growth, be it in further training, education or employment.

This thesis spanned a complex period of time in England, commencing in October 2018, with completion of field work in March 2022. The creative and cultural sector was facing unknown territory in 2018 in connection to funding streams, as European funds narrowed, with withdrawal

from the European Union (EU). An Arts Council England's (ACE) 2017 report, *Impact of Brexit on the arts and culture sector*, found 14% of responding arts and cultural organisations directly benefited from European funding and just under 30% indirectly benefited as users of an EU funded project or part of a consortium application (ICM and SQW). 48% of responding organisations reported the decreasing value of sterling negatively impacted their organisation due to economic uncertainty, increased costs of goods and services, and reduction in sponsorship, philanthropy, and box office sales (p. 28). In subsequent years, as EU and international funding streams ceased, due to Brexit and changing priorities, funds were diverted towards Covid-19 outbreak and recovery funds. The demand for UK funding continues to be stretched as organisations work to recover. Despite the precarity of many creative and cultural organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic, a brighter economic future seems likely, with a 2021 report by Creative UK Group, working with Oxford Economics, suggesting the UK Creative Industries economy could recover faster than the UK economy as a whole, 'growing by over 26% by 2025 and contributing £132.1 billion to the economy in GVA ... more than the financial services, insurance and pension industries combined' (p. 6).

Although the economic impact of arts and culture is not the focus of this thesis, nor is the arts within educational institutions, it is necessary to understand the economic significance and prominence in the wider debate around the impacts of the arts. As the arts continued to be side-lined within education, the 'talent pipeline' needs to seek alternative approaches to enticing young people into the industry, and accessible pathways to provide skills development. The evidence base of economic impact of the arts also paved the way for similarly focused research on social impacts of the arts, although the focus on economic impacts often outweighs the social impacts delivered through engagement with the arts (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; Galloway, 2006; Reeves, 2002). As funders continue to be more stringent on who and what they fund, the requirements to 'prove' impact become heightened, especially in connection to economic investment. It is my assertion that within the participatory arts the social impacts must be addressed as paramount, with consideration of potential economic impacts as secondary.

### Origins of social impact

Consensus on defining social impact is difficult with the term often used as an umbrella term to encapsulate different ideas and agendas. As a general definition, I define social impact as the effect or change that occurs for people in response to something: policy, initiative, programme, project or even a single action. Looking at the historical use of the term in *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History*, Belfiore and Bennett (2008) put forward eight categories of social impact:

corruption and distraction, catharsis, personal well-being, education and self-development, moral improvement and civilisation, political instrument, social stratification and identity construction, and autonomy of the arts and rejection of instrumentality. Whilst Belfiore and Bennett (2008) write from within a creative and cultural context, social impacts are utilised by many other sectors to describe their connections with their publics, wherein more localised impacts or those addressing cohesion might be applied.

White (2009) and Matarasso (2019) suggest social outcomes were developed during the 1960s Community Arts Movement, with arts programmes delivered in varied locations with and for communities. Social outcomes, as described by White and Matarasso, can be seen as the precursor to social impacts, with outcomes defined as the change expected as a result of a project, intervention, etc., and impact connected to the stories of individuals and communities as a result of the change. In more recent years, connections to emergent and unexpected changes for individuals and communities have also featured in more forward-thinking reporting, allowing for reflection and consideration outside expected outcomes. Matarasso notes that, in its early life, Community Arts programmes sought cultural democracy through their work, defining it as ‘... the right and capability to participate fully, freely and equally in the cultural life of the community...’ (2019, p. 77). The movement focused on giving collective voice to communities to tell their stories and experiences, leading to a more critical view of arts and culture’s role in society, and therefore exploring social impacts through inclusive discussion. As the Community Arts Movement’s work became more political in its messaging and structure, the need for specific language to discuss and interrogate the need and outcomes of their work surfaced (Mulligan and Smith, 2010). Research on the benefits and impacts of taking part in community arts projects resulted in case studies with positive and validating anecdotal evidence, but lacked the sophistication needed to convince policymakers that impact was derived from the arts experience. This need to convince policymakers is ongoing, with refined methodologies to demonstrate social impact using more sophisticated tracking systems and social impact dashboards and frameworks to illustrate findings. Such systems are explored further in this thesis, as I question how such distant and transactional data can qualify as understanding the phenomenon of participation and subsequent change without full acknowledgement of the individual’s agency in driving personal and social change. Whilst I acknowledge such tools assist in providing a needed evidence base, I am more interested in the holistic understanding of people and their experiences.



Prior to the Community Arts Movement taking shape in the 1960s, the formation of Arts Council England (ACE) took place in the late 1940s. Established through a grant from the Treasury in 1946, the Royal Charter defines the objectives of ACE as the ability to:

...develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts; increase accessibility of the arts to the public in England; advance the education of the public and to further any other charitable purpose which relates to the establishment, maintenance and operation of museum and libraries [...] and to the protection of cultural property... and advise other areas of government including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.  
(ACE, 2013, p. 2)

ACE continues to receive funding from DCMS and proceeds from the National Lottery, operating 'at arm's length from the government' (Henley, 2016, p. 5). During its 75-year history, ACE has been instrumental in developing and furthering the artistic and cultural community of England, providing funding, advocacy, and research on the impact of the arts.

In its early years, ACE programming focused on a smaller number of public arts programmes and gave money to local authorities to fund local arts programmes. By the 1980s, 262 arts organisations received funding, some participatory in nature. The changing political landscape of the 1980s saw a shift in the funding of arts programmes to a more 'targeted group' approach, and with this, a change from 'community art' to 'participatory art, putting the individual at the centre as opposed to the collective' (Matarasso, 2019, p. 157). The creative and cultural sector began to address not only the economic impact but also how the sector could make a positive contribution to people's well-being, educational attainment, and social inclusion. The most notable example of early evidence of social benefit and impact is believed to be Peaker and Vincent's study of arts in prisons, evidencing examples of improved social skills, teamwork, creativity, and fun (1991). The study made distinction between the social outcomes observed by facilitators of the projects, the outcomes expected from the prison staff, and the outcomes described by the participants.

The latter years of the 1990s saw arts and culture back on the agenda with New Labour Government's commitment to developing local communities. ACE had a solid revenue stream following the implementation of the National Lottery, with proceeds funding nearly £1bn for the revitalisation of arts venues. Reeves suggests the 1990s urban regeneration projects failure to adequately tackle social need, with 'evidence suggesting that benefits were failing to reach local communities, who had little ownership of, or involvement in, regeneration processes in their neighbourhoods', led to interest in the 'potential benefits of arts and culture in communities' (2002, p. 17). In 2011, New Philanthropy Capital held an Impact Summit, with leaders in social impact

measurement in the UK, to discuss the need for change in how charities and social enterprise view and embed impact measurement, moving away from 'a world of compliance, inputs and outputs, to a world of transparency and accountability around outcomes and impact' (Lumley et al., p. 12). It is my assertion that this shift towards transparency and accountability has led to oversaturation of reporting mechanisms and the reduction of experience to preconceived metrics, rather than true exploration of social change. Lumley et al. suggest that social change has come in distinctive waves, including public service reform of the 1980s, the steer from impact funders and social investors in the 1990s to measure change and transformation in people's lives, and the economic crisis of the 2000s which instigated a trend towards evidence-based policy.<sup>5</sup> Belfiore (2015) also connects the UK financial crisis of 2008, from austerity measures to funding cuts, and the restructuring of cultural organisations, placing the onus on creative and cultural organisations to concretely define the cultural value of their programming and its social and economic impact. Additionally, Belfiore (2015, 2020) highlights that use of cultural value and impact are not synonymous, nor is there agreement on defining such terms.<sup>6</sup> The Impact Summit report proposes that the wave of the 2010s was of social sector-wide focus on investing and funding for stronger impact results, to develop impact measurements that complement the social sector (Lumley et al., 2011). The report brought together ideas from some of the biggest UK funders of social programmes, including Big Lottery Fund, Esmée Fairbairn, Pears Foundation, Rayne Foundation as well as organisations researching and advocating on the sector's behalf: AVECO, NESTA, The SROI Network, Third Sector Research Centre, and CAF Venturesome. The report suggests that social change is at a pivotal point, wherein the expectations placed on charities and social enterprises are heightened, with many funders expecting to see evidence of impact at the end of a grant, regardless of length. Ironically, whilst funders are requesting evidence of impact, they also acknowledge that impact measurements can be confusing and lacking in depth. Furthermore, sharing of findings from impact studies and project evaluations are often kept as transactional accounts between organisations and funders, rather than sharing evidence more widely as part of knowledge exchange. These key criticisms are echoed by researchers in the sector, some of which are highlighted in the following key empirical and conceptual studies of social impact in the participatory arts.

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<sup>5</sup> Evidence-based policymaking can be defined using research evidence 'to fill an identified knowledge gap, thereby solving' a policy problem (Greenhalgh and Russell, 2009, p. 305). It is expected that the research evidence be clearly linked to the subsequent policy through use of the best critical evaluation of evidence. Evidence-based policymaking, heavily utilised by New Labour in the 1990s-2000s, brought with it the idea of 'finding out what works and implementing it'. This was not without issue and the positivist underpinnings of such policymaking are often hierarchical, deductive and generalised.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this thesis I address impact as a 'change' as a result of the given arts experience. I attribute 'value' to individuals, more akin to 'benefits' of participation, sometimes referring to this as 'social value'. More widely, I address 'cultural value' to address how organisations produce value through strategic aims.

## Empirical and conceptual studies of social impact and the arts

Matarasso's *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (1997) marked the UK's first substantial empirical study to define the outcomes of participation in the arts. The report builds upon *The Social Impact of the Arts: A Discussion Paper* (Landry et al., 1993), which seeks to assess how the social impact of the arts could be measured. Similar studies emerged in other countries grappling with how best to evaluate social impacts, including Williams's (1997) study *How the arts measure up: Australian research into social impact*, which Ramsey-White and Rentschler (2005) suggest was the first to undertake empirical research on the social impact of community-based arts projects in Australia. Although Williams's report highlighted positive impacts, Ramsey-White and Rentschler suggest that further reports devoted to the social impact of the arts in Australia were minimal in subsequent years. Similarly, in the USA, The Social Impact of the Arts Project, a research group founded at the University of Pennsylvania in 1994, and headed by researchers Stern and Seifert, began to 'ask questions and develop methods to explore the impact of the arts and culture on urban communities' (2017). The research group's focus was, and continues to be, to understand the relationship between the arts and change subjectively in the areas of community well-being, social inclusion, and regeneration. Over the past 20+ years the project has developed methodologies to understand impact, producing numerous reports that widen understanding of individual participation in the arts (1994), measuring creative placemaking (2014) and the impact of civic engagement (2009).

Matarasso's *Use or Ornament?* used a mixed-method approach with projects spanning numerous artforms. The report aimed to contextualise participatory arts and developed 50 social outcomes that were present in analysed projects.

## 50 Social Impacts of Participation in the Arts

Increase people's confidence and sense of self-worth	Strengthen community co-operation and networking
Extend involvement in social activity	Develop pride in local traditions and cultures
Give people influence over how they are seen by others	Help people feel a sense of belonging and involvement
Stimulate interest and confidence in the arts	Create community traditions in new towns or neighbourhoods
Provide a forum to explore personal rights and responsibilities	Involve residents in environmental improvements
Contribute to the educational development of children	Provide reasons for people to develop community activities
Encourage adults to take up education and training opportunities	Improve perceptions of marginalised groups
Help build new skills and work experience	Help transform the image of public bodies
Contribute to people's employability	Make people feel better about where they live
Help people take up or develop careers in the arts	Help people develop their creativity
Reduce isolation by helping people to make friends	Erode the distinction between consumer and creator
Develop community networks and sociability	Allow people to explore their values, meanings and dreams
Promote tolerance and contribute to conflict resolution	Enrich the practice of professionals in the public and voluntary sectors
Provide a forum for intercultural understanding and friendship	Transform the responsiveness of public service organisations
Help validate the contribution of a whole community	Encourage people to accept risk positively
Promote intercultural contact and co-operation	Help community groups raise their vision beyond the immediate
Develop contact between the generations	Challenge conventional service delivery
Help offenders and victims address issues of crime	Raise expectations about what is possible and desirable
Provide a route to rehabilitation and integration for offenders	Have a positive impact on how people feel
Build community organisational capacity	Be an effective means of health education
Encourage local self-reliance and project management	Contribute to a more relaxed atmosphere in health centres
Help people extend control over their own lives	Help improve the quality of life of people with poor health
Be a means of gaining insight into political and social ideas	Provide a unique and deep source of enjoyment
Facilitate effective public consultation and participation	
Help involve local people in the regeneration process	
Facilitate the development of partnership	
Build support for community projects	

Figure 1: Table replicated from (Matarasso, 1997, summary)

In Matarasso's more recent book, *A Restless Art* (2019), he suggests *Use or Ornament's* most significant contribution to the sector was a conceptual framework of participatory art outcomes, indicators of change, and their continued relevance, which can be seen in the post-1997 shift towards robust and transparent evaluative methodologies.

When published in 1997, *Use or Ornament?* was met with criticism and acclaim in equal measure. Reflecting on this, Matarasso suggests that it wasn't the findings or framework that were criticised, but the research methods of collection and questions posed. Merli (2002) wrote a paper reflecting on the report, arguing Matarasso's presented theory of impact was weak. Merli criticises what he saw as Matarasso's assumption that all change is *positive*, because findings of initial impact were positive, leaving little room for change to be negative or neutral. Merli disapproved of the study's lack of control groups, samplings that was skewed with little negative responses, and a low return of questionnaires. Many of the criticisms hold merit and are reflected in subsequent discussions of Matarasso's report including Belfiore (2002), Galloway (2009), Reeves (2002) and Ramsey-White and

Rentschler (2005). Such approaches continue, and one need look no further than current impact reports, such as ACE's *Taking Part Survey* (2018), with sampling, that although wide reaching, is selective, and interrogation into *why* specific responses were gleaned is left without analysis. However, if the sector is to develop a robust evidence base of impact, Merli's argument needs to extend beyond the specifics, with examination placed on the study as a whole and its ability to inform future research. The current trend of theory of change and realist evaluation methodologies address these points, with many advocating for control groups, randomised trials, and baseline data, such as The Cultural Learning Evidence Champion's Handbook, published by the Royal Society of the Arts (Londesborough et al., 2019). These current trends are discussed further in Chapter 2.

The discourse surrounding *Use or Ornament?* presented new opportunities for the arts and culture sector to implement refined evaluation methodologies focused on the social impact of the arts. Reeves' subsequent *Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review* (2002) provides an overview of the social and economic benefits of the arts, focussing on feasibility of impact studies and the perceived need for standardised approaches to gathering and measuring data. These key actions are echoed in the writing of Belfiore and Bennett, who have contributed greatly to the knowledge base of social impact within the arts and cultural sectors (Belfiore, 2020; 2015; 2009; 2006; 2002; Belfiore and Bennett, 2010; 2008; 2007a; 2007b). Woven throughout much of Belfiore and Bennett's writing is a sustained appeal for longitudinal evaluation strategies of social impact and the need to define terms and expectations of those evaluating arts and culture impact. The authors' *Social Impact of the Arts* (2008) positions the need for research to be question-based and open to the intensive analysis of data collected, and to distance itself from research as an advocacy tool. They posit that the use of impact evaluation is too widely used to demonstrate success to funders and advocate for the benefits of their programmes, as opposed to using the process to really understand, analyse, and address issues within programming.

Belfiore and Bennett, Reeves, and Matarasso collectively assert that more research on how to increase knowledge of the intrinsic benefits of the arts, in addition to the instrumental benefits, would strengthen the evidence base, and provide the 'edge' that is needed to prove that the arts can do something 'different' to other sectors in affecting social change. Brooks et al. (2004) addresses this in their study aimed to improve understanding of the benefits of the arts, focusing on the instrumental and intrinsic benefits for individuals and the public. Brooks et al. describe the instrumental benefits (e.g., improved confidence or social skills) as an indirect benefit, separate to the arts, and intrinsic benefits as those reliant on the arts experience. Intrinsic benefits are often

viewed as valuable on their own and not as a pathway to further outcomes (p. 67). The authors argue that there is scepticism regarding the instrumental impact of the arts and acknowledge that the intrinsic benefits are often overlooked. This debate is a common refrain in discussion of participatory arts work. Why does the vehicle for change come through an arts intervention? What is the value of working through a dance engagement, community mural project, or development of a theatre piece with local young people, rather than a non-artistic mode? Reason suggests the intrinsic value of the arts continues to remain elusive.

... [I]f the claim being made is that participation in the arts increases people's self-confidence and sense of self-worth, then it becomes possible – not straightforward but possible – to think about how that might be measured and evidenced. The huge challenges of such a question seem a piece of cake in contrast to any attempt to evidence the *intrinsic* value of the arts; not at least because it is not at all clear what might be meant by that, however certain we might be that it exists.  
(2017, p. 39)

Indeed, through my research I found few examples of impact studies of art engaged programmes that give but a cursory nod to the intrinsic benefit of participation in the arts for young people. Research into the intrinsic value of viewing theatre as opposed to taking part in theatre-based activities is available (Brown and Novak-Leonard, 2013; Bakhshi et al., 2009; Boudier-Pailler, 1999; Brooks et al., 2004), with Brooks et al. proposing a conceptual framework to measure the intrinsic value of art and culture, discussed further in this chapter. Further research in how to address this needed connection between the intrinsic and instrumental value of arts participation continues to be explored by researchers using narrative enquiry and ethnographic practices (Simons and McCormack, 2007; Denzin, 2003 and 2008). Belfiore and Bennett (2008; 2010) perceive the arts to be in a fragile position within public policy and the pressure placed upon them to deliver transformative impact. Such a precarious relationship between the arts and public policy has most certainly driven impact reporting towards the instrumental, demonstrating the more pragmatic, transferrable, and universal outcomes that most people can relate to, rather than exploring the intrinsic values of participation.

Addressing balance of instrumental and intrinsic values of the arts indeed remains elusive, as demonstrated in some ACE commissioned studies. ACE seeks to find out how arts and culture impacts people's lives, helps organisations improve practice to demonstrate impact and inform arts and culture policy (ACE, 2019) through an ongoing *Taking Part Survey* (2018a), commissioned by DCMS in partnership with Sport England and Historic England. The survey gathers data on the number of visits to arts events, museums, sporting events, libraries, and heritage sites; who is

participating in creative activities; and addresses motivations and barriers. Some participants are approached in numerous years to develop a longitudinal understanding of participation and attendance. Keaney notes a drawback of the *Taking Part Survey* is its inability 'to provide information about the specific venue or timing of engagement or about the exact status, for example amateur or professional, of the activities involved' (2008, p. 140). Keaney suggests the survey is 'an effective national benchmark, which allows individual organisations to compare their own audience profiles with national and regional attendance and participation patterns', yet it is not the most effective way to understand 'the characteristics of audiences at particular venues or events' (p. 140). I suggest that whilst such reports provide snapshots and address patterns of engagement, they do little to truly uncover stories of social impacts in connection with people.

A more in-depth commission by ACE, used as supporting evidence for the 2020-2030 *Let's Create* strategy, *Every child: Equality and diversity in the arts and culture with, by and for children and young people* (Blood et al., 2016), presents a data and evidence review, aimed to broadly analyse children and young people's access to arts and cultural activities, with a focus on equality and diversity, to make connections to socio-economic status and educational attainment of participants. The report synthesises evidence on barriers to the arts; pathways into employment in the arts; and who accesses arts programming; calling for a 'step change' to provide access to the arts, in line with the ACE strategic Goal 5, to allow '[e]very child and young person the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries' (p. 4). This is now reflected in the 2020-2030 strategy, *Let's Create*. Findings suggest that there is need to widen opportunity; improve the use of data about children and young people who take part in arts activity; ensure that funded programmes increase equality and diversity in their cultural offer; encourage best practice; and create activity and action research on the subject (p. 27). Connections to Blood et al.'s report can be found within *Independent Review of the Creative Industries* (Bazalgette, 2017), referred to at the beginning of this chapter, especially within the need to widen access and opportunity for children and young people to engage with arts and culture.

Incorporating the findings of Matarasso, Reeves, Belfiore, Belfiore and Bennett, Blood et al and others, I additionally explored studies that successfully add to the evidence base of social impact in arts participation from specific arts engagement fields: arts education, arts in health and arts in criminal justice. These fields hold prominent studies of participation that illustrate how other participatory arts can develop deeper understanding of impact. This chapter concludes with elaboration on the current evidence base connected to my focused area of study: participatory arts

projects with young people, within a theatre-based environment, using examples from applied theatre and youth theatre.

### *Arts education*

In the field of arts in education, Bamford (2006) conducted a global study, drawing upon case studies, submitting data from over 40 countries, with the aim of establishing a global compendium that looked at 'arts-rich' education. She focused on organisational frameworks to understand how the teaching of arts programmes occurred, and the qualitative and quantitative analysis of data collected. Bamford's research has positively contributed to dialogue on the impact of arts within education, forming a baseline for researchers and policymakers in the arts and education. She addresses how the arts benefit students learning in primary and secondary education, making distinction between arts *in* education and arts *through* education. Equally, Southern (2019), referencing Fleming's (2011) article, argues 'learning *through* the arts is more democratic in nature, and has the closest associations with contemporary practice. Whereas, learning *in* the arts has been more focused on the intrinsic benefits of the disciplines, and therefore associated with traditionalist standpoints, for example the 'art for art's sake' movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century' (pp. 6-7). Whilst Southern is advocating for further engagement *through* the arts, presenting a binary between intrinsic and instrumental impacts exacerbates the divide. Bamford weaves qualitative and quantitative data together to form indicators of impact presented alongside case studies. The research methodology predominately used survey responses from worldwide leaders in the field, thus developing a wider perspective. Still, this was limiting the scope, as the surveys sought the leaders and organisers views, yet did not interrogate the end users' reflections. Furthermore, surveys were of course only collected from those that returned them, therefore excluding the voice of many. This exclusion is due to a multitude of reasons: lack of resource to complete surveys; lack of understanding of benefit of taking part; disinterest; and most likely in some cases, the survey not moving past an initial gatekeeper.

Conversely, findings from See and Kokotsak (2015) suggest the impact of the arts on children and young people's educational attainment is limited. The report commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation completed a literature review that reflected evidence of arts education impact on cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for children and young people aged 3-16 across multiple artforms. Interestingly, in the forward for the review penned by Sir Kevan Collins, he states that he subscribes to 'arts for art's sake', which suggests connection to the intrinsic benefits of the arts, yet follows up this statement by highlighting how the report explores the relationship of arts



education on the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes to 'identify the most promising ways in which learning through the arts can support disadvantaged young people to achieve key educational outcomes', thus situating the report within the instrumental benefits of arts participation (p. 1). The remit of the report was to locate arts activities 'that have evidence of promise, as well as an overview of those where the results are inconclusive, or which have not been evaluated' (p. 5). In a review of 199 studies, they concluded that none were of high-quality and conclusive evidence of impact of arts activities in education could not be found. Whilst this is a worrying conclusion, I would suggest the research parameters and indicators sought were unrefined. Many of the studies included were small-scale with limited wider applicability. Those that were large-scale were cross-sectional and, therefore, causation and correlation could not be explored. Such reports continue the debate on the subjective nature of qualitative data and exacerbate the calls for standardised systems of data collection and analysis.

Two years following See and Kokotsak's report, The Cultural Learning Alliance undertook a similar review of studies with large sample sizes of 12,000 or more, reporting 'we can emphatically say there are instrumental outcomes which cultural learning delivers' (2017). The research found participation in the arts enhanced behaviour of children, leading them to do better in school; increased cognitive abilities by 17%; saw an 18% decrease in re-offending for young offenders; and promoted better health of children with 38% reporting good health. Such differences in findings remind us of the epistemological and ontological framings of research, where review of datasets and reports can be analysed differently.

#### *Arts in health and arts and criminal justice*

When moving towards participatory arts programming which works with specific groupings of people, the evidence base becomes more nuanced, such as that of arts in health and arts and criminal justice. The use of arts in health practice has grown in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, moving from the confinement of hospital settings and out into the social healthcare or social prescribing models, working toward improvements in social inclusion and cohesion. Raw et al state 'the field is complex-arts and health denotes a sector so broad that even those involved in it perceive it in very different ways' (2012, p. 1). Macnaughton et al define arts in health as 'comprising all activities that aim to use arts-based approaches to improve individual and community health, health promotion and healthcare, or that seek to enhance the healthcare environment through provision of artwork or performances' (p. 333). The authors conclude few projects result in '... direct health improvement but rather at intermediate indicators of health gain, such as raising awareness of health issues and

social activity and participation' (2005, p. 331). As a relatively new field, different approaches continue to be explored with some focused on the therapeutic benefits of the arts, others on support for health staff, as well as creative ways to share findings. Clift suggests that, as the field has developed, the scale and quality of evidence has improved, resulting in numerous reports demonstrating the interest in the arts contribution to health. Working within the health sector, evaluation methodologies are more inclined to draw on scientific tools to demonstrate impact such as randomised controlled studies. Whilst prevalent and largely with positive results, the practice of random control studies cannot answer 'how does an intervention work; is it acceptable to potential participants; is it an appropriate intervention given participants needs; and are service users and other stakeholders satisfied with the intervention?' (2012, p. 123). Clift suggests the challenge is to find progressive research designs to 'provide a robust body of knowledge for evidence-based practice', which will enable the smaller arts and health programmes to thrive, demonstrating an 'effective and cost effective' improvement to public health (p. 125). Raw et al argue that the drive for 'evidence-based impact research in arts and health may be overlooking a fundamental weakness in the overall debate', suggesting that, without aims towards deeper understanding of mechanisms of change, the evidence base will remain insubstantial (p. 2). It is interesting to note that, even in a sector which employs scientific and social research measures delivering quantitative and qualitative results, the evidence base is still called into question. Nevertheless, since the early 2000s, the development of social prescribing programmes continues to take shape and, in more recent years, an influx of further access points to arts engagement for mental health and well-being (Redmond et al., 2019).

Similarly, the impact evidence base of participatory arts within the criminal justice system continues to grow with positive connections and impacts emerging. Hughes (2005) completed the first critical review of impact of arts programming in criminal justice settings. The report focused on prevention, custodial and community sentencing, as well as resettlement, aligning arts-based interventions in these key areas. Her findings included the ability for the arts to be an effective strategy for rehabilitation and raising awareness, whilst also building key skills, changing perceptions, and enhancing personal and social development. Hughes suggests that there are examples of robust evaluation within arts and criminal justice, but they appear in isolation. As within the arts in health programming, there are areas in need of improvement, with Hughes highlighting a lack of baseline measures, small samples, over-reliance on anecdotal evidence, assumptions made of participants and their likely outcomes/impact, and lack of clarity on the arrival at findings. Addressing some of these issues, The Arts Alliance Evidence Library was created as part of The Arts Alliance's *Making the*

*case for the arts* to hold research evidence on the effectiveness of the arts in the criminal justice sector (The Arts Alliance, 2022). This resource holds over 100 evaluations from independent researchers, academic institutions, and arts organisations, creating a much-needed evidence base to champion impact of the arts and criminal justice. This rich resource provides the foundation for further research and makes evidence accessible to a wider audience. Such a resource devoted to other areas of arts programming would be beneficial to the sector, bringing together small-scale projects that evidence impact for interrogation and development of best practice, and making use of a wide array of impact reports developed over a length of time.

### *Youth theatre*

Whilst there is a growing evidence base in both arts in health and arts and criminal justice programmes, the evidence base of youth theatre programming continues to lack in depth. To my knowledge, the only substantial study that addresses the impact of youth theatre is Hughes and Wilson's study *Playing the Part* (2004), which explored the impact of participation in theatre in conjunction with young people's personal and social development. The authors use the term 'youth theatre' to define projects that work with young people in varied forms that are not in school-based education or have accreditation attached, or which are solely training platforms for entry into further education. The authors' definition includes inclusive theatre forms such as applied theatre, issue-based theatre, youth arts, and theatre in education programmes presenting performance in schools with workshops attached. Hughes and Wilson use a grounded theory and narrative approach with mixed methods including surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The report aims to develop a 'theory of youth theatre' that could be applied to a wider audience by contextualising personal and social development within models of practice and through the generation and analysis of the evidence. They champion a participant-centric approach, bringing young people into the research process and using participatory workshops to gather data, drawing upon role and performance theory to frame their findings. The researchers note that they were interested in identifying and explaining the impact of youth theatre as opposed to addressing impact across all youth theatre participants, which is evidenced in the development of their theory. They assert that the developed theory of youth theatre supports claims that personal and social development is enhanced through participation but suggest that a longer-term study to test theoretical propositions should be undertaken. The report's scope is limited, with findings shared in distinctive sections: interviews, questionnaires, and workshops.

Nearly 20 years post-study, the evidence base of youth theatre impacts seems to have grown little. In his 2014 PhD thesis, Kosnik suggests similarly, concluding there is 'not enough (or, in some cases, any) representation of actual youths' voice' and 'very little of the literature explores youth in traditional theatrical environments' (p. 43). This is of course a limited viewing of engagement with theatre focused on theatre-based work, yet if connection between the need for the intrinsic value of the arts and instrumental outcomes is desired, there is a need for further research in this area. This is additionally worrisome as it side-lines the experience and potentialities that engagement with theatre can hold for young people.

There are of course a variety of project-based studies that consider impacts, such as longitudinal studies that share strong connection to applied theatre projects. Hanrahan and Banerjee (2017) conducted a small-scale study of the impact of theatre and drama involvement. Working with four young people, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews over two years, at three separate times. The study was designed to address 'how and why drama and theatre activities 'work'' and to further understand the 'psychological mechanisms that underpin individual changes and growth' through theatre involvement (p. 36). Individual voice was present throughout the analysis, looking at each participant in isolation, developing outcomes through discussion including: a nurtured space to grow and be valued, developed friendships, and positive activity for self-expression. The authors note that within the first interview participants commented on how taking part in the evaluative process had impacted their outlook, reflective process, and ideas for further change (p. 44), a key aspect that I contend is missing in many evaluative processes, the value of evaluation for the participants. The authors suggest a larger study with 'samples of young people from a number of different drama and theatre projects would allow for an examination of how different experiences of drama and theatre projects relate to self-construal and motivational outcomes' (p. 46). Hughes and Wilson, Kosnik, Hanrahan and Banerjee's studies, amongst others, form a foundation for my research process and aided in my thinking about how to advocate for plurality of voice within discussion of social impact of participatory arts programmes.

This chapter explored the foundations of the economic and social impact of the arts in the UK. There is clearly an existing evidence base on the social impact of arts participation, yet its depth, focus and content cannot appease everyone. Permeating the discussion is the confusion of what constitutes impact and value, a perceived lack of robust studies within the arts, especially within the participatory arts, and consensus on what evidence is needed to validate impact. These discussions

are continued in more detail within Chapter 2 where I interrogate the systems by which social impacts are evaluated, produced, and disseminated.

## Chapter 2: Social impact frameworks and approaches employed in the arts

In Chapter 1 the history of economic and social impact of the arts in the UK is explored, presenting existing evidence. Chapter 2 describes the benefits and problematics of currently employed impact approaches within the arts. This is followed by examination of a selection of existing social impact frameworks applied to participatory arts work and use of theory-based evaluative models, using examples from the UK, USA and Australia, all of which attempt to align to traditional paradigms of research and evaluation. I then approach impact investigation from outside the traditional paradigms using arts-based and participatory research methodologies to explore social impact.

### Problematising use of traditional impact paradigms

The Labour Party Manifesto of 1997 addressed the government's approach to social and economic programmes, putting forward the phrase 'What counts is what works', with David Blunkett arguing for evidence-based policymaking to help government understand 'what works and why' (Wells, 2007, p. 2). The government's use of evidence-based policy aimed to create a 'ideology-free procedure to guide decision-making in the public sphere' (2010, p. 129). Belfiore and Bennett (2010) argue that defining 'what works' is subjective and therefore political in its very nature. Furthermore, they suggest the emphasis on evidence-based policy places pressure on artists and arts organisations to develop their impact evaluation towards the production of results indicating engagement in the arts, with little focus on instrumental impacts such as social cohesion and individual transformation nor depth to the intrinsic impact of the engagement. Belfiore and Bennett (2010), Belfiore (2015; 2020), Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) and Scott (2014) all consider how the value of the arts in its many forms; social, cultural, aesthetic and economic are considered and how the arts sector continues to grapple with how to expand and validate the evidence base. This has led to the development of numerous frameworks and evaluation methodologies to measure impact in the arts and participation in arts programmes. Despite the body of impact studies focused on the arts, there is continued tensions as to how the existing evidence base is used and how to strengthen it. When viewing data already held, Matarasso proposes a 'meta-analyses of the vast bodies of data funders now hold [to ...] create knowledge that could improve practice, policy and spending decisions' (2019, p. 195). In considering how to strengthen the evidence base, O'Connor and Anderson argue that impact is not elusive and commissioning further research or setting standardised approaches for evaluative design will not solve the evidence problem. They posit that the sector needs to 'reconfigure the philosophy, the ethics, the discourse of *how* we conceive of evidence within the context of participatory arts practice' (2015a, p. 2). Raw and Robson advocate the 'broadening of accepted methodologies can generate higher-quality evaluation, capable of providing reliable

evidence in discourse on impact (2017, p. 137). Similarly, Matarasso suggests the participatory arts should aim to 'generate less but better data' that recognises '... the value of art as a source of well-grounded qualitative data' (p. 194). In broad terms, criticism is placed on the sector for a lack of 'hard evidence' on the impact of the arts due to the largely qualitative research methods used, as they complement an arts process, yet such methods produce evidence that is often perceived as merely anecdotal evidence, with little rigour and theory (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007b; 2010); as opposed to studies with focus on economic impact, where validation is more readily given due to the quantitative and concrete nature of their findings. Furthermore, agreed measurement of the social impact of the arts is difficult to pinpoint, due to the varied engagement levels participants and audiences will have with participatory arts programmes (Reeves, 2002). A standardised approach, for example, cannot be applied to a one-off day time engagement with a forum theatre production, and that of a yearlong weekly engagement building a sculpture that brings together a range of people from different backgrounds to work collectively.

Mercer argues policymakers need more information about the arts and culture suggesting, '[w]e need more numbers, more facts, more indicators, more benchmarks in both quantitative and qualitative terms' (2003, p. 2), with standardised approaches to evaluation in the arts beginning to supply this data. Johanson et al. advocate for standardised approaches suggesting they can,

... be used to report on the state of national arts and cultural sectors; establish the contribution of the arts and culture to broad and complex concepts, such as community well-being and cultural vitality; advance fairness and equity in the working conditions of artists and access and inclusiveness in arts activities; and enable comparison between different arts and cultural organisations; as well as cultural trends over time.  
(2014, pp. 46-47)

A common criticism of standardised frameworks is the generalised outputs they create, especially where they focused in on quantitative data collection. Often within arts impact evaluation, use of a standardised framework can lead to data bearing little resemblance to the creative experience, with the voice of the participant or user suppressed in favour of metrics with supporting anecdotal evidence (Galloway, 2009). Scott and Soren suggest that there is a 'failure to find a framework that articulates its value in a cohesive and meaningful way' and an avoidance of the need 'to establish a system for collecting evidence around a set of agreed indicators that substantiate value claims' (2009, p. 198). Approaching the issue from a different perspective, Hughes and Wilson (2004) suggest a closer look at small-scale research projects that develop robust theories of impact within clear frameworks to discover how arts impact occurs and demonstrates substantive value. Crossick and Kaszynska (2016), Cahill (2018), and Balfour and Freebody (2018) encourage theory of change

based evaluative models to develop narrative whilst also addressing findings within the created theory.

Regardless of approach used, few studies are fully accepted by the wider academic community or by policymakers (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016). Commissioned by Arts and Humanities Research Council, Crossick and Kaszynska compiled a significant piece of research, *The Cultural Value Project*, bringing numerous research studies together primarily focused on the *value* of the arts, although *impact* is implied. The key aim of the research was:

... to cut through the current logjam with its repeated polarisation of the issues, the intrinsic v the instrumental, the elite v the popular, the amateur v the professional, private v public spaces of consumption, qualitative v quantitative evidence, and the publicly-funded v the commercially orientated.  
(2016, p. 6)

The Cultural Value Project explores how to better understand and measure cultural value with prominent focus on putting the individual at the centre of the experience. Crossick and Kaszynska propose that participation in arts and cultural activities helps shape reflective individuals; produce better engagement with civic activities; contribute to improved health and well-being; lead to positive health outcomes with long-term engagement; and contribute to improved motivation, communication, confidence, and cognitive abilities (pp. 7-8). Crossick and Kaszynska 'question the hierarchy of evidence that sees experimental methods and randomised controlled trials as the gold standard even in areas where these cannot effectively be applied, because of the difficulty in isolating variables in complex situations' (p. 149).

Participatory arts programmes hold such complex situations, making random controlled trials difficult to implement, even if they are held in high regard because they can attribute causation. Much to my dismay, use of controls has made its way into arts impact studies as featured in the Royal Society for the Arts' guide to working towards an evidence agenda in the arts (Londesborough et al., 2019). Addressing use of traditional evaluative forms and control groups, O'Connor and Anderson suggest 'these traditions carry with them assumptions, sometimes colonizing, that can prove problematic for applied theatre programmes and the communities they serve' (2015, p. 44). O'Connor and Anderson's suggestion can also be applied more widely to the participatory arts, where use of randomised control trials might be seen as exclusionary for specific groups of people. The legacy of traditional forms of research permeates, with participatory arts impact studies being subjected to the late 1990s and 2000's neo-liberal focus on outputs rather than outcomes, creating a



narrowed scope of impact and most often stripping any connection to the intrinsic benefit of arts participation from reporting (Dunphy, 2015). Additionally, Raw and Robson highlight the continued trend in evaluative reporting for monitoring statistics, which produce quantitative data, arguing that this is useful from a marketing perspective, but does little to assess the value of the programme (2017, p. 125).

I further Raw and Robson's concern for how data is manipulated to serve specific purposes and question for whom the act of collecting data, analysing it, and disseminating it is truly for. The synonymous use of impact evaluation for discussion of short- and medium-term change and as an accountability and advocacy tool for funding validation can lead to overly polished and positive accounts, omitting or underplaying negative change, or the absence of change and unintended outcomes (Holden, 2006; Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016; Raw and Robson, 2017). Matarasso suggests it is not simply an issue of *for whom* the study is written, instead it is connected to 'the long and costly effort to prove art's social, economic and intrinsic value [that] is entangled in a political culture concerned with control, not with knowledge or wisdom of experience' (2019, p. 163). Reeves (2002), Merli (2002), and Galloway (2006) further this argument, suggesting that research explores the whole person and experience, not just the parts that are directly linked to the 'fundable' areas, thus acknowledging the possibility of negative change or of the absence of change alongside positive change. Etherton and Prentki (2006) additionally challenge the assumption that all positive short-term findings are directly followed by positive long-term impact and lead to social change, suggesting studies need to be framed to allow for plurality of outcome. Furthermore, the consistent positivity of many impact studies and evaluation reports can be in part attributed to the increasing expectation of funded programmes to utilise evidence-based approaches, make theories of change explicit and programme outcomes/outputs reported against clearly stated development objectives (Funnell and Rogers, 2011).

The validity of arts-based research findings is also challenged by small sample size, limited hypothesis testing, and reliance on anecdotal evidence. Theory-based or theory-generating approaches that use both quantitative and qualitative methods, inclusion of participant voices, and stronger outcome measurements that employ narrative enquiry to create more useful insights into impact are potential ways to strengthen reporting, yet are time consuming (Cahill, 2018; Freebody et al., 2018; Hughes and Wilson, 2004; Reason and Rowe, 2017). Longitudinal studies may also further our understanding of arts impact and the connection between participation and participant change, although as Prior suggests, 'correlation rather than causality is the likely outcome' of longitudinal

studies (O'Connor and Anderson, 2015, p. 265). Causation harks to a colonial history when organisations' reading of evidence implied that participation in a particular project or intervention was the upmost achievement or influence on future life choices, defining a whole person based on snippets of qualitative data. The ethical implications of control groups and randomised trials sit uncomfortably for me, especially when working within the participatory arts and with marginalised communities. I question the benefits of randomised control trials as a tool to validate and produce rigorous and authentic evaluation, especially in complex programmes where the outcomes should be variable. I see continued use of such approaches to legitimise evidence as diluting knowledge generation and stifling opportunity to investigate how change happens, seeking instead to validate presumed ideas. Indeed, I suggest that even when a participant attributes participation as 'transformative' or 'life changing' at a project's end, evaluative design needs to account for reflection and the initial buzz of taking part to be digested. Only then can notions of change really start to emerge, when participants embody their new knowledge, reflect on their experiences, and move towards their next goal or pathway.

### Standardised approaches to explore impact of arts participation

The participatory arts practitioner or organisation has a multitude of standardised evaluation frameworks to choose from. I will use examples to demonstrate how frameworks have addressed social impact, selecting those closely aligned to participatory arts practice, holding connection to participant-centric ideologies, welcoming (to some extent) the intrinsic value of the arts, and those that invite open-endedness. Some examples seek to challenge the traditional research paradigms from within, whilst others attempt to do so from outside.

### *Impact and Insight Toolkit*

I begin by addressing ACE's *Impact and Insight Toolkit*, as it is the most recent attempt to create a standardised framework to address arts engagement and perception in the UK. ACE, Counting What Counts and Culture Counts<sup>7</sup> standardised metric framework; *Impact and Insight Toolkit* was rolled out for all National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) in 2018. The toolkit aims to support the growth of arts and cultural organisations and artists; to enable them to tackle challenges; to provide

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<sup>7</sup> For clarity, ACE works with both Counting What Counts and Culture Counts on the Impact and Insight Toolkit. Counting What Counts specialises in impact evaluation and measurement, seeking stronger measures to communicate outcomes and aid data-driven decision making. Culture Counts is an evaluation platform that developed the metric framework and software used as part of the Impact and Insight Toolkit. Culture Counts initially worked with Western Australia Department of Culture and the Arts to develop a system for evaluating of the intrinsic value of the arts, discussed within this chapter.

opportunity for children and young people to ‘develop their creative potential to the full’; and for people across the country to benefit from ‘investment in culture’ (Arts Council England, 2019, p. 3).

Culture Counts suggests the toolkit gives the UK arts sector benchmarks to analyse the quality of arts programmes, help for ‘arts and cultural organisations to understand people’s perceptions of their work and how well this aligns with their creative intentions’, and to create a dataset that ‘builds shared understanding of the value of cultural experiences’ (2018b, p. 2). The development of this framework took place over seven years, working in consultation with arts organisations, many of whom voiced concerns over the generalised scope of the toolkit, the additional labour required by arts organisations, concern that audiences would be bombarded with numerous surveys, and the mechanics of the peer review system (Counting What Counts, 2019). Whilst there are benefits of creating ‘snapshots’ of how an organisation may be performing in reference to another, the homogenisation of data given in metric form provides little information in my opinion and provides so little of the larger picture. It seems feedback on the current toolkit has been taken into account and a refined version, aptly named Toolkit 2 will come into effect mid-2023 for all new funded projects, although the changes within the toolkit are currently unclear.

Interestingly, a pilot of the *Impact and Insight Toolkit* in its earlier form, ‘Quality Metrics National Test’, was completed by Culture Counts in Australia, on audience engagement with the arts to encourage transparency by placing all artforms and projects on equal footing. It was one of the first standardised metrics frameworks ‘to measure the quality, value, impact and reach of arts and culture activities’ in Western Australia in 2014 (Gilmore et al., 2017, p. 283). On completion of the pilot, its rollout was deemed unviable and closed. *Counting culture to death: An Australian perspective on culture counts and quality metrics* describes it as ‘an indicator and metrics-based framework to collect, categorise and report on three sources of information gathered from standardised surveys, claiming to redress the lack of a consistent language in culture’s assessment’ (Phiddian et al., 2017, p. 174). Phiddian et al suggest that the data produced is merely marketing analytics and give little information about the artistic integrity or value of the experience. They argue that ‘metrics systems for artistic quality imply a spurious homogeneity of purpose in the arts, invite political manipulation and sequester time, money and attention from arts organisations without proven benefit’ (2017, p. 178). Whilst Phiddian et al’s provided a scathing review of the framework, others were in support. Mowlah suggested it was vital as it ‘encourages audience members to really *think* about the work they have experienced and why it affected them in the way it did’ (2017, p. 322); and Smithies (2017) argued that from an innovative technological perspective it is a useful tool,

providing the first platform that amalgamates data, allowing users to have information at their fingertips, without need for highly trained evaluators. Throsby (2017) voiced concern that metrics should not be used to produce a league table for arts organisations to measure up to each other.

Seemingly ignoring the concerns of the Australian pilot, ACE, Counting What Counts and Culture Counts moved forward with the framework which features within ACE's ten-year strategy from 2020-2030, positioning their commitment to,

providing a clear account of the impact we are having across the country. [...] We will develop a set of performance measures- covering areas such as the take-up of publicly funded cultural and creative opportunities by adults, children and young people, the value of the cultural sector to the nation's economy and the diversity and geographic spread of our investment...

(Arts Council England, 2019)

Counting What Counts successfully secured the contract to continue the delivery of the impact toolkit from 2023-2026. Reporting on the first four years of implementation is not readily available, although a December 2022 blog post available on ACE's website (Dunford, 2022) reflects on the toolkit so far, drawing on feedback and reflections to date. The suggested recommendations come as little surprise and are indeed disheartening to read, citing a need to focus on 'understanding how an evaluated project contributes to wider objectives, rather than looking at them just in isolation'; a need to 'place more focus on interpreting evaluations 'in the round'; consideration on 'how a completed activity contributes to an ongoing programme of work'; and whether that 'programme of activities is achieving its objectives'. I note that the voice of the audience and/or participants does not feature prevalently in this discussion as an indicator of change or success. In standardising and attempting to funnel complex engagement with audiences and participants into beautifully formed metrics, I suggest that what has emerged is a diluted framework devoid of adequate qualitative underpinning to describe experience and whilst robust in its breadth, without the rigour that it intends to achieve.

The homogenisation process continues within the 'next stages' of the toolkit design as laid out in Dunford's blog post, suggesting National Portfolio Organisations will work to 'convert' their mission statements 'into the language of the dimensions' as described by ACE. It is assumed that this will then help to create a stronger dataset to consider. From the onset, ACE saw this toolkit as a way of minimising the time NPOs needed to spend on reporting, yet in theory, I would suggest that it will require more time as actual understanding of impacts will need further investigation as the toolkit and reporting mechanism will not provide what organisations need to tell stories of impact. For

example, ACE suggest that surveys seeking qualitative data can be difficult to process, therefore encouraging NPOs to include short open-ended questions such as their preferred use of ‘three words to describe an experience’ as a way of eliciting response. Whilst there are, of course, benefits to this developing evidence base and acknowledgement that further enquiry into strengthened qualitative evaluation must occur, my viewing is that this takes away from ownership of experience and ability to develop and understand change. Selwood additionally questions the impartiality of the Toolkit, suggesting that ‘NPOs are potentially compromised by their dual role as data providers and grant recipients’; and queries how ACE considers its role as both ‘an official statistics provider and development agency’ (2019, p. 190).

No doubt there will be amendments and further sub-sections of the toolkit that address more nuanced discussions and needs of organisations in the revised *Impact and Insight Toolkit 2*. I draw on the following three frameworks that attempted to marry the need for metrics alongside exploration of experience from qualitative methods and create a stronger focus on engagement in the arts rather than viewing of the arts.

#### *How it works Framework*

Funded by the United States of America’s National Endowment for the Arts, the *How it Works* framework keeps participation at its core, differentiating outcomes for individuals and broader impacts (Iyengar et al., 2012). The five-year project evolved from a desire to move away from analysing datasets, instead creating a ‘theory of how the arts work’, using a system map to examine multiple components in tandem and develop a shared understanding of complementary outcomes. Using a theory of change model (discussed in further detail within this chapter), it suggests outcomes can be interrogated separately and synthesised, defining ‘quality-of-life outcomes’, or first order outcomes, that are attached to individual and community benefit from engagement in the arts; and the ‘broader societal impacts’, or second order outcomes, that lead to ‘societal capacities to innovate and to express ideas’ through ‘new forms of self-expression’ and ‘outlets for creative expression’ (p. 13). The framework is extensive, providing opportunity to discuss negative or neutral outcomes and provides one of the first visual representations of mapping and identifying relationships between outcomes and outputs. Critics suggest the framework is generic in its overall approach and lacks acknowledgement of previous research in specific areas of arts engagement where particularly strong evidence is known, such as arts education (createquity, 2012). Of value is the framework’s ability to address causal attribution through a theory of change model.

### *Inspired Learning for All Framework*

In the United Kingdom the museum sector responded to pressure to define social impact in 2008 with the creation of Generic Frameworks: including generic learning and social outcomes. The Inspired Learning for All (ILFA) framework, developed in collaboration with Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and arts organisations (now disbanded and placed with ACE's remit in 2011), is still available via the ACE website and was widely used within arts organisations in the UK. Although simplistic as a framework, it created a momentary unified vocabulary for the museum sector. Dobbs et al. (2014) suggest the generic framework provides a methodology that is applicable for all organisation types and users. It has been used successfully within the arts sector and has allowed for refinement of evaluative measures to understand what users/participants need, know, think, and feel. It is not without criticism though, with Selwood suggesting the use of generic learning outcomes 'make no distinction between different cultural activities and no reference to the subject matter or content which encompasses values or generates particular outcomes' (2010, p. 5). Selwood suggests that generic learning outcomes fulfilled a political purpose but did little to widen understanding of the impact of arts and cultural experiences for visitors and audiences. Furthermore, the ability to explore the intrinsic value of the arts past 'enjoyment' is difficult. Still, as an arts practitioner in the early 2000s, I appreciated ILFA's open structure which allows for discussion outside intended outcomes and the ease of moving to examples in a more narrative approach.

### *A holistic framework for evaluation of arts engagement*

Australian researcher, Dunphy (2015) created a framework for measuring the holistic value of arts participation as an alternative to what she considered an 'either-or' approach to intrinsic and instrumental outcomes focused on either social or economic impact. She suggests that a holistic approach takes into consideration the human experience, allowing for neutral or negative outcomes and addresses views of varied stakeholders, which often do not feature within the reporting structures. The framework works across three areas: perspectives of change (the who), dimensions of change (type of change), and degree of change (how much) (pp. 14-21). The perceptions of change use a visual to describe the likelihood of impact for different groups of stakeholders. Types of change are broken down into six categories: personal well-being, cultural, social, civic, economic, and ecological. Whilst similar in feel to ILFA's guiding areas, these categories could be considered more encompassing of the whole person than ILFA's model which examines learning outcomes in isolation from the social outcomes. Dunphy's categories are then filtered down into seven potential subcategories each thoroughly considered with theoretical underpinning. For example, in the 'social'

category, subdomains include: developed friendships; recognition from valued others; and equality of opportunity for all people in the community. An approach such as this can be tailored to fit the needs of a given participatory arts programme as it connects the participants to the wider social and economic impact, whilst still allowing for individuality. Dunphy's third area, 'degree of change', provides a nine-point rating scale ranging from negative, neutral, up to positive change. Dunphy argues that this scale can be used for self-reporting, via survey answers, and by then assigning a value to interview and observational data, with the evaluator making judgment, essentially taking what is often considered anecdotal evidence into a numerical form. Additionally, the use of baseline data can be used in longer-term change reporting. Although I consider scales and assigning value and impact of change from observational perspectives difficult due to its subjective nature and unconscious bias of the researcher, this well-defined framework holds a multitude of considerations, especially as it brings the intrinsic impacts to the table and does not treat them as an afterthought.

Dunphy's framework draws greatly on *The Gift of the muse: Reframing the debate about the benefits of the arts* (Brooks et al., 2004), one of the first studies to challenge the notion that focus need be purely on the instrumental impact of the arts as it is more suited to quantitative and qualitative research. The intrinsic value of the arts is indeed difficult to ascertain but plays a significant role in how arts programmes impact the lives of participants. The framework questions how social change and individual transformation can be aligned to arts-based encounters if the intrinsic value of the experience is not investigated. The framework divides intrinsic benefits into three parts: pleasure and captivation; growth in individual capacities, including empathy; and social bonds that appear when participants share their experience. It additionally suggests that finding ways to increase sustained involvement in the arts would lead to higher levels of engagement and experience. Dunphy's framework additionally echoes some findings laid out in the 2013 DCMS report, *A Holistic Approach to Valuing our Culture* (Donovan, 2013), that identifies ways to combine economic and non-economic approaches to addressing impact using economic valuation and narrative approaches.

### Considering theory-based methodologies

Theory-based evaluation has gained in popularity since the early 2000s among arts researchers investigating the connection between participation and subsequent action, as well as considering all aspects of a programme: the participants, the artform; the outcomes; and the circumstances surrounding the project. Arts researcher, Galloway suggests use of theory-based evaluation 'views human beings as *agents* in social change and change as occurring in open rather than closed systems', making it an ideal model for arts researchers to consider all aspects of a programme (2009,

p. 131). Realistic evaluation and Theory of Change (ToC) are commonly used forms of theory-based evaluation in the UK, developing theory using a generative model of change (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007). ToC, developed in the USA by Aspen Institute in the late 1990s, maps the need for a specific intervention, outlining the steps needed to achieve a desired change and examines *how* and *why* the defined change will happen in its specific context (Center for Theory of Change, 2022). Similarly, Pawson and Tilley's realist evaluation aims to find what outcomes were produced during an intervention, how they were produced, and what conditions may have varied in interventions (Tilley, 2000). Both models place participants at the centre of the research, relying on their 'motivations, attitudes, previous knowledge, and skills' to discover impact of the intervention (Rogers et al., 2000, p. 51). Galloway suggests both models help in 'developing theories of causal change; [...] provid[ing] knowledge about how and why change occurs (what works, for whom, in what circumstances); [...] helping to develop "evidence", particularly of causal attribution' (p. 133). Using a generative model to investigate causal attribution, the models examine context, mechanisms of change and process to discover what happens through the intervention that may lead to change, whilst also understanding the circumstances surrounding the intervention (p. 131). The creation of generated theory, as proposed by Galloway, may be used to interrogate subsequent programming and similar interventions, thus leading to a richer evidence base rooted in theory.

Theory-based evaluation begins to address assertions that the wider arts community needs to examine how it conceives of evaluation studies of the participatory arts, what its purpose may be, and what it aims to uncover. The use of ToC models to describe vision of social change provides active engagement from a variety of stakeholders when done well. This can be a helpful exercise for organisations to complete, as it challenges them to consider their assumptions, the activities they run, and to be explicit in how they consider an activity to result in the social change they wish to achieve. A ToC needs to continue being a working document with a well-considered evaluation strategy attached to it that addresses plurality of voice and of change.

ToC models are not without issue for a variety of reasons. I negate the notion that participatory arts programmes can deliver a singular 'theory' and suggest that 'theories' are more applicable. To reach the agreed 'theory' or 'theories' a ToC model provides, what often appears is a linear structure by which the agreed change will occur. Conceptualising a participatory arts programme that is time-bound into a simplified system using a ToC, an organisation is suggesting that if the programme is completed to its fullest by following a prescribed series of small goals, or achievements completed in the correct order, then change is inevitable. These outcomes, being pre-determined, fulfil an



organisational agenda and do not always reflect the aspirations, passions, or agendas of individual participants. Whilst a ToC allows for organisational assumptions to be made clear, it cannot take into account all lived experiences of participants, nor their reasons for engaging in a particular programme, which I address in the following case study. Furthermore, the barriers participants may face are complex and multiple. Whilst my analysis perhaps oversimplifies the process, I suggest that use of ToC without a robust and holistic evaluation methodology, that encourages listening and reflexivity, practitioners and organisations are limited in their analysis as it keeps discussion to the confines of the ToC. A theory of change can be viewed as what Duffy refers to as, 'an example of methodological fundamentalism – where the method is more important than the subject of the evaluation' (2017, p. 47). Indeed, in producing a ToC the research process is essentially subverted, 'silenc[ing] particular types of evidence and experiential knowledge' (p. 47), which makes me query how lived experience and personal schema can be utilised in the development of narratives beginning from a ToC. The application of criticality towards a programme and its outcomes is limited with a ToC model, thus creating cyclical validation of a programme, without consideration of potentialities outside the 'known' that could be innovative and of value, instead relying on discussions that 'fit' within the ToC. Lastly, I question hierarchy and positions of power that a ToC is usually derived from, placing such theory in the hands of the delivering organisation and not the end user, or participant. This, in turn, places the organisation as changemaker and not the individual. Participatory development of a ToC is suggested, yet this is not always the case in practice.

Where organisations do employ listening to all the data collected and a reflexivity to their analysis, a ToC can help them move towards being open to emerging ideas. There are also benefits to a theory of change model that can most certainly be applicable to other forms of impact evaluation and theory generation. Reflecting on the standardisation of evaluation of youth work in the UK, Duffy suggests that, whilst on one hand, government asks for differentiated forms of evaluation that include a plurality of perspective, this is, on the other hand, seemingly wanted through a standardised and metric form, relegating narrative forms as 'non-scientific' or 'anecdotal', promoting what she considers a "master epistemology" a belief which, according to contemporary writing on pluralist social inquiry, is indicative of scientific reductionism' (2017, p. 53).

By consistently positioning ToC/outcomes-oriented evaluation as of a higher standard than participatory approaches (through labelling the results of the latter 'anecdotal' and 'non-systematic'), government agencies have constructed a discourse of evaluation research where openings for stakeholders in youth work to express their experiences or challenges the targets set by government are closed down.  
(Duffy, 2017, p. 56)

Whilst theory of change models and standardised approaches to evaluation are not the enemy, I consider their use restrictive to wider discussions of social change and deepening the knowledge base of what social impacts can be achieved. I support a hybrid model that incorporates more open methods of discovery that can uplift evaluation and demonstrate change from pluralistic perspective. The ability to produce such evidence invokes power struggles, often usurping communities and individuals of their ability to name and define change as their own, whilst also excluding the nuances that reporting aims to address. I view the experience of taking part in an evaluation process rather differently and prefer to invite participation and allowing each individual to develop the dialogue of their own change, connections and pathways from their own perspective, thereby placing the ownership of thought, experience, and reflection with them, not the organisation or given practitioner. Furthermore, I acknowledge and expect correlation of experience, as this is truly what a participatory arts experience is about, making connections to the wider world and using it past the confines of the participatory arts space.

To consider the possibilities outside standardised frameworks and theory of change-based approaches, I have looked to arts-based research and participatory methodologies to consider how they can add richness to the developing evidence base.

### Arts-based research methodologies

The application of arts-based methodologies often resides within what Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) refer to as, 'questionable hierarchy of evidence' amongst the wider research community, yet emerging studies, using narrative accounts and frameworks, may support a stronger evidence base. Arts-based research has become more prevalent in the past twenty years with a host of handbooks and ways of working put forward (Barone and Eisner, 2011; McNiff, 2008; Leavy, 2015; 2017). Eisner first used the term 'arts-based research' in the 1990s following advances in the study of arts, especially within creative arts therapies (Leavy, 2017). Leavy suggests that, within qualitative research, arts-based research has gained in interest following a 'narrative turn' (Bochner and Riggs, 2014), wherein researchers 'attempt to avoid the objectification of research participants and aim to preserve the complexity of human experience' (Leavy, 2017, p. 8). The use of an arts-based research methodology combines the researcher's inquisitive nature as both an artist and researcher, melding practices that are 'holistic and dynamic, involving reflection, description, problem formulation and problem solving, and the ability to tap into, identify, and explain the role of intuition and creativity in the research process' (Leavy, p. 9).

Leavy highlights academic debate as to whether arts-based research is its own paradigm, or a field within the qualitative paradigm. This is also the driving agenda put forward by O'Connor and Anderson (2015), speaking from an applied theatre perspective, they challenge the research community to consider how ethnographic and arts-based research can better align to the needs and desires of marginalised and silenced participants, proposing a paradigm shift to find 'more democratic, participatory and critically informed research methodologies' rooted in arts-based inquiry (p. 22). Viewing arts-based research as a separate paradigm closely related to qualitative research, Chamberlain et al (2018) examine the possibilities for arts-based research and psychology, a field that currently dismisses research falling outside the quantitative, suggesting there is reticence within the scientific community to accept qualitative research, let alone qualitative research derived from an arts-based methodology. The authors comment, '[a]rts-based research steps away from scientific method, eschewing measurement, causality, and the certainty of interpretation. In fact, arts-based research could not be more opposite to, and different from, "scientific research"' (p. 131). Chamberlain et al suggest arts-based research leaves the interpretation of findings to the reader or audience, allowing for a multiplicity of interpretations that may be well outside the researchers intended aims. Indeed, use of arts-based research often ends with more questions than when it began. Nevertheless, Chamberlain et al edited a special edition of *Qualitative Research in Psychology* devoted to arts-based research to encourage conversation and enlighten current psychology practice, proposing that the use of arts-based research can allow for creative expression and extend 'capacity for understanding the human condition', leading to 'better access to the emotional, affective, and embodied realms of life, cultivate empathy, and challenge and provoke audiences to engage with complex and difficult social issues' (p. 133).

Bringing traditional research methods to the artistic arena, arts-based research methodologies not only offer something 'different' or 'new' to the research process, they provide the researcher access to new knowledge as it is formed and expressed by participants during a creative engagement. McNiff defines arts-based research as 'the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies' (2008, p. 29). Rowe and Reason suggest 'arts-based knowledge' has the capacity 'to engage with and represent the complexities of lived experience, particularly through maintaining apparent contradictions in flux and dealing with wholes rather than atomized parts' (2017, p. 58). It is precisely this ability to engage with the 'wholes' and Chamberlain et al's musings on the extension of

‘understanding the human condition’ that gives arts-based research its unique perspective and what can be viewed as alternative to sitting within a traditional canon of approaches.

Providing an excellent example of a study informed by arts-based research, Gallagher shares the voice of young people in her study *Why Theatre Matters: Urban Youth, Engagement and a Pedagogy of the Real* (2014). Whilst Gallagher’s study does not prescribe to that set out above by McNiff, Gallagher refers to the study as situated in arts-based framing that draws upon qualitative and quantitative research methods to create a ‘youth knowledge base’ on engagement in theatre amongst urban youth. The study demanded ‘participation, dialogue, and interaction in both the social and aesthetic planes of the teaching and learning experience’ (Neelands in Gallagher, 2014, p. xvi). Gallagher suggests the subsequent participatory arts-based design ‘tapped into’ the ‘potential of engagement as a multidimensional construct that involves behaviour, emotion, and cognition’ (Gallagher, 2014, p. 13). The resulting longitudinal and multi-sited study demonstrates youth voice, in its positive and negative forms, providing provocations for further studies and informing arts and culture policy on an international scale.

#### Participatory research methodologies

Arts-based research by its very nature is participatory. O’Connor and Anderson position three different ways of approaching research: arts-based research, community-based participatory research, and participatory action research. Their description of art-based research echoes that of Leavy and McNiff, arguing, ‘... knowledge of the world cannot and should not be reduced to words and numbers alone’ (2015, p. 24). Arts-based research challenges traditional forms and ‘... rejects the notion of singular truths or clear answers, instead searching or contrasting nuances, revealing ambiguities and complex multiple truths (p. 24). A community-based participatory research approach puts the ‘actor’ or participant as lead decisionmaker as to method and discussion, often used in arts and health models. Participatory action research (PAR) was developed as an alternative to methodologies ‘replicating the intellectual colonialism of Western social research into marginalised worlds’ (2015, p. 21). PAR works *with* communities throughout the research process, placing agency and change within participants. Similarly, Rowe and Reason argue for research approaches that include participants as it may enhance participant experience and demonstrate ‘lived experience and benefits of the participatory arts process’ (2017, p. 51).

Integral to the participatory research process is Freire’s critical pedagogy (1972), placing participants with ‘control over their lives and their capacity for dealing rationally with decisions by enabling them

to identify, understand and act to transform' (p. 35). Balfour suggests that as applied theatre (sitting within my definition of participatory arts) instigates change, change is 'not always linear, rational and conclusive in its outcomes, but is more often messy, incomplete, complex and tentative' (2009, p. 357). Balfour suggests within the applied theatre context, we look for theatre of 'little' changes, looking for the unexpected and accidental outcomes that occur through participatory work. The use of ethnographic and arts-based research provides the foundation for theatre of 'little' changes to emerge.

### *The Verbatim Formula*

There are numerous examples of arts-based research projects that apply innovative frameworks to capture participant voice. I include one such project here, The Verbatim Formula, as an example of an original framework that applies drama-based techniques as a participant-centric research method, evaluation process, and dissemination tool.

The Verbatim Formula (TVF) is a participatory action research project employing verbatim theatre techniques 'to attend to the voices of care-experienced young people, care leavers, and adults responsible for their care' (2022). TVF is based at People's Palace Projects, Queen Mary University, bringing young people together with facilitators to work collaboratively as 'experts of their own lives' to interview and record fellow participants. The words and experiences of the young people are shared with audiences using 'headphone performance' as described by TVF, to raise awareness and challenge care practices. The recorded interviews are edited, and then performed by an actor who listens to the recording, relaying the recording to an audience through careful listening. Recordings are shared anonymously and through the performer as conduit, allowing audiences space for 'reflection and dialogue, not defensiveness or blame' (Inchley et al., 2019). TVF suggests the words of a care-experienced young person, carefully and respectfully delivered through a professional actor, makes people stop and listen. TVF has wide reaching aims: to enhance education and social outcomes for care-experienced young people; to provide a platform for employees in the care system to listen to concerns; to further understanding of 'the potential of verbatim practices as a creative research, evaluation and dissemination tool'; and 'to develop a performative inquiry practice where the aesthetics of listening are central' (The Verbatim Formula, 2022). TVF's innovative form is also reflected in its evaluation process, eschewing an outcome driven approach with baseline and summative reporting structure which 'impose a need for participants to change in a certain way' (2022). Alternatively, the evaluative process is firmly embedded in the delivery of the project and developed in partnership with participants, with the aim of an 'empowerment-driven

participatory methodology' through creative and performative activities, producing agency of choice with participants. Participants provide feedback through activities, supported by an evaluator's observation and ethnographic notes to create a narrative account. TVF acknowledges and respects the voice of the young person, keeping it at the forefront of evaluation. In bringing the voice of the care leaver to the policymakers and audiences, the words resonate.

TVF presents a bold and carefully crafted structure borne from a desire to keep truthful representation, reflecting both participatory and arts-based research methodologies. These methodologies are connected to engagement and understanding of a given participant group. The following section considers theory-based evaluative approaches that move more towards evidence-based research than arts-based, yet still are informed by and respond to participants.

### Potentialities of reimagined social impact frameworks

As explored in Chapter 1, the neo-liberal agenda of the 1990s and 2000s fuelled funding priorities and reporting structures, and subsequently impacted how arts organisations are asked to evaluate programming. Evaluation and impact are often synonymous with achieving the parameters of grant agreements, validating programmes as 'of quality' or 'worth investment'. As a result, in the arts sector, I argue evaluation and impact reports can be reduced to self-serving cases for support, rather than reflexive and holistic review of programme outcomes and deepened understanding of participants' experience and subsequent impacts. Whilst this hegemonic structure serves arts organisations well as it demonstrates impact and encourages further funding, I suggest that more meaningful engagement with participants in data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings may deepen organisational understanding of impacts and uplift participant understanding of how their experiences inform further iterations of programming. Furthermore, continual investment in long-term impact studies of the impact of participatory arts programming is needed. There appears to be an expectation of immediate and sustained impact for participants.

Whilst agreement on how to improve the arts impact evidence base remains, the sector acknowledges there is need for change. As illustrated in the above examples, impact evaluation frameworks need to be suited to specific contexts to gain the best possible data from participants (Matarasso, 2019). The use of bespoke models can lead to deeper and specified understanding but are at risk of only being interpreted in isolation, unfit for cross examination as part of a wider evidence base. Conversely, use of standardised frameworks whilst more consistent in their reporting and ability to compare findings across multiple projects, as explored with ACE's current *Impact and*

*Insight Toolkit*, can lead to diluted data that makes drawing out stories and understanding of impact difficult. To create bespoke forms of evaluation, Cahill (2018) pushes for a proactive approach, using a hunter-gather' approach to obtaining data, drawing from varied fields, urging evaluators to acknowledge and report on the negative outcomes that surface alongside unintended outcomes. Crossick and Kaszynska hold similar assertions for a broader approach to evaluation drawing on social science, economic and ethnographic practice, suggesting use of ethnography offers 'clear advantages to arts organisations wishing to supplement more traditional evaluation tools such as exit questionnaires and on-line surveys, while sustained ethnographic approaches offer even more for evaluation and research' (p. 152). The inclusion of varied stakeholders within research and reporting to develop a holistic approach to arts evaluation, weaving the perspectives of participants, audiences, facilitators, and policy makers together is also put forward as a way of enhancing current systems by Dunphy (2015, p. 4).

This chapter has presented a wide range of research and evaluative methodologies that can be applied to participatory arts programmes to develop discussion on the social impact and value of programming. Earlier I questioned the role of impact reports and their intended audiences. My assertion is that if the lens by which we view evaluation shifts from that of an advocacy or marketing tool to that of a learning, reflexive and knowledge sharing tool, the process and findings deepen and can be used as living documents from a holistic perspective. Historically, evaluation methodologies for participatory arts programmes are pre-determined having found a system 'that works' and is therefore applied to complete reporting for particular funders, most often using a top-down approach that places the organisation in a position of authority. Moreover, with movement of reporting away from a transactional account between organisations and funders, there is opportunity to celebrate participants' reflections as demonstrated in some reporting. Similarly, a move towards more critical reflection of systemic placement of organisational power, engagement with participants and ongoing support may provide framing as living documents rather than simply summation of findings. Whilst there are examples of co-created evaluation methodologies with participants, where ownership is placed on a more collective footing, these are not without issue. The time and resource involved in such models may not be available to organisations, especially if projects are short-term. The assumption that participants want to take part in a co-created evaluative endeavour is also problematic and can lead to placement of power being pulled back by an organisation. Lastly, in challenging the traditional paradigms organisations can put relationships with funders at risk if data does not comply with their criteria. To be bold, participant-centric, and committed to data gathering, analysis and dissemination that reflects a given organisational ethos is

not without issue, yet there are potentialities to enhanced participant autonomy and reflection within the evaluative process. Such potentialities are explored further in the final chapters of this thesis.



### Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter develops the research methodology undertaken for this thesis and has been informed by the body of literature explored in Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 provides the foundation for discussion of social impact and addressed intrinsic and instrumental values of the arts, both as spectator and participant. In Chapter 2, I problematise existing evaluative frameworks and consider emerging and alternative forms of understanding impact and knowledge generation. The methodology presented within this chapter, and used throughout my research, is focused on impact evaluation and knowledge generation of participatory arts programming. I situate my methodology as an alternative to the predominance of positivist qualitative approaches, viewed as ‘proven’ epistemologies (Bryant and Charmaz, 2019, p. 20), and as an opportunity to challenge unsupported anecdotal reporting and unsatisfactory methodologies prevalent in evaluation of participatory arts programmes (Belfiore, 2002; Belfiore and Bennett, 2007b; 2010; Matarasso, 1997; 2019; Snyder-Young, 2018). Rather than leaning into the UK’s current penchant for indicator-based approaches, such as theory of change models, the methodology employed is approached more as a social inquiry, underpinned by ethnographic and reflexive research practice. I use an application of mixed methodologies and the intentional use of complementing theories to elucidate notions of impact and consider pedagogical underpinnings of participatory arts programming. Through this approach, I aim to support and welcome plurality of voice and interrogate evaluative approaches and impacts of participation using Lyric’s approach to participatory arts work as a case study, presented in Part 2. Lastly, this methodology provides the foundation for the development of a conceptual holistic evaluative framework for participatory arts work presented in Part 3.

As acknowledged in the previous chapters, the creation of a *universal* methodology for capturing the value and impact of participatory arts programmes is not attainable; and calls to build a stronger evidence base will continue as academics, practitioners, funders, and organisations all aim to examine value and impact from their own ontology and placement as managers of arts and culture. I consider understanding of value and impact as inherently subjective and evidence of change connected to the experience and participant. Whilst the growth of larger datasets on impact is welcomed, there is much to learn from qualitative analysis of individual experience. I place my research within this analysis of experience. Furthermore, I consider reflection of experience and discussions of impact to take time and space. Participants, practitioners, and organisations must be given opportunity to fully digest and interpret their ideas. What may feel, in a moment of elation, as a defining moment can be viewed differently through reflection by participants and organisations alike. What I suggest is not a new concept, yet my assertion of the need to share and consider

conceptual frameworks to explore the personal and social impacts of such programmes, along with wider findings, can encourage more meaningful dialogue on social change within the participatory arts. I recognise that the emerging holistic framework developed in this thesis as one that encourages open-endedness, plurality of experience, exploration of learning, ownership of participant change placed with participants and not the organisation, and the acknowledgement of project failures, will not appease everyone, nor will it encompass all participatory arts projects. Nonetheless, it provides a positive contribution in the field of participatory arts and understanding its impacts and acts as a reminder of the importance of participant-centric modes of knowledge gathering and encouragement of honest dialogue of reporting structures and impact.

Through the scoping and analysis of existing reports and frameworks discussed previously, as well as review of many others that are not noted within this thesis, the following overriding themes presented themselves: a need to discover and interpret pluralistic experience and knowledge of participatory arts with integrity; acknowledgement of emergent outcomes within the wider discussion of participatory arts programmes and their impacts; consideration of who impact research and reporting is for; and making implicit organisational agendas, detangled from participant change. This methodology explores organisational understanding of change but considers participants' internalisation and reflection on change as primary. Disrupting what I refer to, in Chapters 1 and 2, as 'neoliberal expectations of change', defined by pre-determined intended outcomes, I position participants as owners of their experiences and knowledge in a co-evaluator role, utilising self-reflective interviews with participants, placing organisational and researcher observation as secondary. I utilised ethnography as a methodology and reflective research within my fieldwork.

## Ethnography

Ethnography as a methodology has become more popular over the past twenty years and lends itself well to the research design. Dependant on approach, ethnography can be viewed as solely based on direct observation of a given phenomenon or can incorporate other data such as document review and interviews. As with most research methodologies, definitions vary as they are employed and revised by researchers over time. In the early 2000s, as ethnography began to emerge in different areas of research outside its anthropologic roots, it was a term relatively unknown outside research circles, evoking what Gobo suggests as 'the exotic, epic and heroic', placing the ethnographer 'as some kind of Indiana Jones figure' (2008, p. 16). Miller and Brewer define ethnography as:

... the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social *meanings* and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting (if not always the activities) in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.  
(Miller and Brewer, 2003, p. 99)

Taking a more open view, Mitchell suggests ethnography is 'a catch-all term to describe any form of long-term qualitative research based on a triangulation of methods' (2007, p. 55). Gobo and Marciniak put forward a more negative view of how the methodology has evolved, suggesting ethnography 'has become an abused buzz-word and has been diluted into a multitude of sometimes contrasting and contradictory meanings and become synonymous with qualitative studies' (2016, p. 104). Gobo and Marciniak's criticism of the unwieldy usage of the term may be warranted, but I would suggest that the exponential growth of the methodology over the past 20 years is based in its ability to humanise<sup>8</sup> research data, moving it from purely observational of the 'Other'<sup>9</sup> towards engaging narrative that seeks to define and understand phenomenon from pluralistic perspectives. Ethnography allows for the construction of multiple truths. It can be used to seek new knowledge within communities and does not need to be stifled and relegated to a predominately measured methodologic approach. Recent ideations of ethnography found in social science, arts and humanities research are creative and offer inspiring outputs, including the growing interest in performance and visual ethnography (Leavy, 2017; Gobo et al., 2020).

The problematics of employing an ethnographic approach need also be considered including the navigation and negotiation of the role of the researcher (discussed in the introduction and in Chapter 6), the viewing of people from external vantages, and the need to be gain entry and acceptance into the given research group (discussed below and within subsequent chapters). I work against such problematics in interviewing participants through the structuring of interviews using key tenets of a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is the development of theory which is 'grounded' in the data collected and analysed and invites open-ended questions and space for the interviewee to tell their story in their own time. I elaborate on this approach in Chapter 7.

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<sup>8</sup> I draw from Freire's discussions on humanisation (found below, p. 61), and from Paris, who suggests, humanisation occurs through the conscious act of building 'relationships of care and dignity for both researchers and participants' (2011, p. 140).

<sup>9</sup> I employ a sociological, rather than psychoanalytical defining of 'Other' here. The latter effectively suggesting that anyone or anything outside 'self' is 'other'. Krumer-Nevo and Sidi put forward the following definition of Otherness from a sociological frame: the act of placing 'moral codes of inferiority to difference (Pickering, 2011; Schwalbe et al., 2000), the critical discursive tool of discrimination and exclusion used against individuals on the basis of their belonging to marginalized groups (Boreus, 2006; Riggins, 1997)' (2012, p. 300), Said's (1978) writing on orientalism provides underpinning context for notions of Otherness, highlighting Eurocentrism.

## Reflexive research

A reflexive research approach was employed to acknowledge subjective voice, assumptions, and potential conflicts that might arise in discussion. Berry suggests *how* and *why* the research is discussed within the study, considering:

Shifting positionalities (based on place, time, gender, race, class, sexuality etc.) from which a researcher reads, writes, analyzes, indicate a recognition of the part played by the socializing texts of scholarly discourses, academic expectations and context throughout time and space. (2015, p. 83)

Reflexivity has been a long-standing critical component of qualitative research, deriving from phenomenology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Finlay defines reflexivity as: ‘... thoughtful, conscious self-awareness. Reflexive analysis in research encompasses continual evaluation of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself’ (2002, p. 532). Pillow describes a similar process, noting most researchers engage in reflexivity to some degree, even if they haven’t specifically named it within their methodology (2003). Furthering the connection to the need for reflexive practice as a researcher, Kleinsasser suggests ‘deeper, richer meanings about personal, ethical, and epistemological aspects of the research question’ begin to emerge through reflexivity (2000, p. 155). Echoing Berry’s assertion that the *how* and *why* needs exploration, Hertz develops the reflexive ethnographer’s practice as ‘not simply report[ing] ‘facts’ or ‘truths’, but actively construt[ing] interpretations of his or her experiences in the field and then question[ing] how those interpretations came about’ (1997, p. viii). This shifts the epistemological framing from objectivity towards subjectivity, as researchers consider ‘what I know’ and ‘how I know it’ through an active process.

There are numerous typologies of reflexive practice (see Denzin, 1997 or Andersen, 1989 as example). Pillow defines four common reflexive strategies: reflexivity of self; reflexivity as recognition of other; reflexivity as truth; and reflexivity as transcendence (pp. 191-197). Pillow warns that whilst the activation of reflexivity aims for criticality of self, what may emerge is a hegemonic structure that is in fact what researchers are working against (p. 192). To address this, she puts forward useful approaches such as the use of witnessing<sup>10</sup> to sympathetically write about experiences that are not those of the researcher, suggesting witnessing can be used to interpret others’ lives ‘using our own words and paradigms to present stories of our own experiences with the Other’ (p. 22). The use of witnessing, noticing, or any form of reflexive practice does bring into

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<sup>10</sup> To bear witness implies active listening, reflection, and giving voice to the lived experience of people.

question how researchers can create honest accounts of people that capture their true essence, whilst still allowing the voice of the 'researched' to resonate and speak for themselves, something I considered often within my research.

Approaches, such as those described by Pillow, help address the problematic nature of reflexivity in connection to the Other, as well as account for how the Other has participated within the 'making' of their image (Trinh, 1991, p. 67). Pillow additionally suggests drawing on plurality and power to address multiple truths and seeking transcendence from 'subjectivity and own cultural context in a way that releases her/him from the weight of (mis)representations' (2003, p. 186). Such approaches interrupt reflexivity in its practice and propel the researcher to make the connections. This propulsion towards connecting ideas assists in combating what some scholars see as a navel-gazing, inward focused process (Etherington, 2004, p. 31). Indeed, consideration of the researcher's placement within the research is necessary, i.e. if the researcher is at the centre, rather than the participant group or phenomenon being explored, this can be problematic. I sympathise with such criticisms and have worked to situate reflexivity as an opportunity to negotiate power relations and interrogate ethical issues. Through continuous reflexivity, I critique my subjectivities, strengthen my methodological approach, and bring an awareness of my social standing and experience in the world. Furthermore, in Chapter 6, I utilise thick description to enhance ethnographic observations, reflective and reflexive writing to provide context that goes deeper than the surface appearance of situational context, making connections to wider discussions (Ponterotto, 2006).

It is important to clarify how and where I use reflexivity and reflection within this research. To differentiate the terms, I draw from Chiseri-Strater who provides a helpful distinction between the two: '...to be reflective does not demand an 'other', while to be reflexive demands both an other and some self-conscious awareness of the process of self-scrutiny' (1996, p. 130). I connect reflexivity to Freire's notion of critical consciousness and analysis of my actions within the research process and its stakeholders. As described within the case study developed in Part 2, I call for reflexivity from the Lyric team (including freelance practitioners), considering awareness of their impact and ways of working with participants, and suggest time for reflective thinking from participants, who are honing skills and wider knowledge.

### Theoretical underpinnings

Throughout this thesis, I draw on theorists to develop lines of enquiry in context, most prominent, Freire and Moufee. Freire's seminal texts, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and *Pedagogy of Hope*

(Freire and Freire, 2014) underpin my methodological approach and understanding of the application of participatory arts programmes with underrepresented young people. Freire's defining of the 'banking system' of education, where students are viewed as empty vessels and are filled by the teacher's knowledge, thus, 'banking' new knowledge, is important to consider when viewing participatory arts programming. The participatory arts should be the antithesis of the banking system. Participatory arts should be inviting co-creation, collaboration, and agency to the process of learning and creating. Freire's critique of this system, originally focused on creating literacy programmes for Brazilian communities, puts forward the concept of 'conscientização' or critical consciousness: the act of learning 'to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality' (Freire, 1972, p. 19). As the communities Freire worked with began to consider and understand their social conditions, they reflected on their own placement within the world, leading to change in their own perceptions. This new knowledge and literacy skills gave agency and desire to make change more widely within their communities and within their own lives. Contemporaries apply the idea of critical consciousness in varied forms and are often connected to applied theatre and Augusto Boal's interpretations of Freire to create Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979).

Closely linked to research and evaluation from a holistic framing, I also draw on Freire's definition of humanisation, which he contends cannot be pursued in isolation, instead placing it within social context and through action with one another and the world. Through the process of becoming more human, we consider the past, engage, and reflect on the present and present future possibilities, 'attempting *to be more* human' (Freire, 1972, p 73). Freire's humanisation places consciousness and material reality as the site where change occurs. Whilst society may be conditioned towards certain ways of thinking through the structures and practices laid out, we are never fully determined by them. Freire considers the future 'not as inexorable but as something that is constructed by people engaged together in life, in history. It's the knowledge that sees history as possibility and not as already determined. The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming' (Freire, 2000, p. 72). He sees one's role as subjective, not restricted to observation alone but placing oneself within that world, registering what happens. Freire considers transformation of the world to be 'a dialectic between two actions: denouncing the process of dehumanization and announcing the dream of a new society' (p. 74). Such notions inform ontological and epistemological positioning of social constructivism, with knowledge constructed through human activity and people making meaning through their interactions with society.

Freire welcomed the idea of teachers and students acting as 'critical co-investigators in dialogue' (p. 81), shifting the role of teacher from knowledge holder and creator to narrator. He suggests through construction and sharing, '[k]nowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other' (p. 72). Many participatory arts programmes encourage a Freirean approach that eschews hierarchical structures, inviting people to engage as co-investigators and disrupting traditional forms of knowledge sharing. I contend that understanding the impact of such programmes needs also to challenge hierarchical structures, which place organisational interpretation of individual change as ultimate, and the personal (individual) change as secondary. I suggest that the evaluation of participatory arts programmes utilise key tenets of Freire's work, moving participants from passive vessels to knowledge holders of experience and changemakers.

I additionally draw from political theorist Moufee's writing to define and contextualise plurality and power struggles presented within this study and in the consideration of evaluating participatory arts programmes. Moufee suggests power struggles cannot be avoided as voices are weighed by their authority and knowledge. The struggle to define where and how relationships exist is the 'political', with the 'political' standing separately from 'politics', which Moufee refers to as, '... the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seeks to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting since they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'' (2013, pp. 2-3). Moufee considers pluralism as '... many perspectives and values, but due to empirical limitations, we will never be able to adopt them all; however, when put together, they could constitute a harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble' (p. 3). I consider the concept of a 'harmonious and non-conflictual ensemble' as the goal of impact evaluation, presenting perspectives which may not be in agreement, but shed new light on the varied ways in which participants and organisations interpret new knowledge and experience, situated within the existing knowledge base. In doing so, I explore ownership of knowledge without the 'weighing' of experience through an authoritative perspective.

Moufee posits a main challenge of acknowledging 'the political' dimension is the potential for the 'antagonism that exists in human relations' (p. 6). She suggests people are intrinsically confrontational and antagonistic because of the social constructs in which we live, therefore our relationships are built on temporary hegemonic structures that inherently hold an antagonistic dimension (p. 9). Moufee considers the question not to be 'how to arrive at a consensus reached without exclusion', as this creates a binary of *them* and *us*, but to move towards addressing conflict, or multiple truths as I would call it, through an agonistic perspective, a 'struggle between

adversaries' rather than 'between enemies' (p. 7). The vision of reaching 'consensus' is a result of the unchallenged hegemony of neoliberalism, which Moufee suggests strips people of their right to agonistic debate, 'in which they can make their voices heard and choose between real alternatives' (p. 24). A 'conflictual consensus', on the other hand, allows for disagreement on meaning-making and placement of value, adding richness to discussions even within the hegemonic order that will never be eliminated.

Moufee's use of agonistic pluralism brings the political to the foreground, acknowledging the struggle to allow differing values and views to be heard. When applied to this research, the 'political' begins to appear in the hegemonic framing of participatory arts programmes used to communicate content and disseminate findings. Moufee asserts that in embracing this notion, researchers 'acknowledge that within plurality of voice there will be conflicting views' (p. 104). It is these conflicting views that challenge traditional sensemaking, the desire to rationalise what others are doing, by making connections to account for what is happening collectively (Fellows and Liu, 2016). Through a constructivist epistemological framing, I posit that strengthened connections can be explored within participatory arts programmes, where participants often combine their project-based experience with their personal schema and perceptions of what is expected during self-reflective activities. Regardless of sensemaking approach, narratives of participation will, at times, complement each other, at others, co-exist, and at others, will still be embroiled in power struggles where viewpoints are incompatible. This notion of the struggle to hear, acknowledge, and imbue value of differing and multiple voices played heavily on my mind as I grappled with the evidence base and narratives provided to me across my field research.

### Consideration and testing of other methodologies

There are a multitude of methodologies that could have been selected to explore the impact of Lyric's START and other programmes. Many of these were considered, some tested and discarded, others were brought to my attention through research, and I am sure, there are many I have yet to discover.

Many emerging research and evaluative methodologies, especially those working in the creative and cultural sector and education, place participants as co-researchers, co-inquirers, or collaborators, using a more action or participatory research approach. I do regret not being able to engage more fully with participants in the creation and testing of the research methodology, yet with the closure of the theatre this proved difficult. The time away from the theatre, where young people had little or no contact with Lyric, meant the need to regain trust from participants and find ways to welcome



them back into the building. The time of reopening was also the time when Lyric did not have a Producer of the Inclusion and Outreach strand of work, and therefore, no one to guide programming, making it even harder to re-engage past participants, especially as there was no further activity for them to engage with.

Developed further in Part 2, this research was conducted as part of a collaborative PhD with Lyric and was not without its challenges. Meeting the perceived vision of the collaboration was, at times, difficult to fulfil. Lyric's vision for START and wider work with young people continued to evolve across the research period but suffered from disparate understandings of the programme's aims and expectations of impacts for participants and Lyric. With changing organisational leadership (at Board, Senior Management and Delivery level), fresh visions for the artistic and participatory work were assumed, altering delivery models, and intended outcomes of the programme. Throughout, I aimed to acknowledge and adapt to these changes. Additionally, the extended closure of the theatre due to the Covid-19 pandemic had a notable impact on vision, programming, and importantly, relationships with young people.

The methodology developed and employed throughout this research utilises ethnographic and reflexive approaches which are further developed and evidenced within Part 2. Freire's theoretical underpinning of critical consciousness and humanisation, and Moufee's discussions on plurality resonate within the critical case study which follows. The methodology and findings ultimately lead to the development of a conceptual framework for evaluating participatory arts programmes, utilising theories of friendship, with-ness and hope, described in Chapter 9.

## Part 2: Understanding impact: Lyric Hammersmith Theatre as case study

Part 2 puts forward a critical case study of Lyric's work with young people, focusing on its START programme for young people not in education, employment, or training. This flagship programme has run since 2005 as part of the theatre's mission to provide creative engagement activities for people in West London. This critical case study interrogates the complexities of the programme and its placement within historical and current organisational priorities and considers wider perspectives of social impact of participatory arts. Part 2 is delivered in five comprehensive chapters: Chapters 4 and 5 address Lyric as an organisation and the historical evidence of START's impact; Chapters 6 and 7 explore impact from research observation and participant perspectives; and Chapter 8 synthesises findings and provides recommendations to redress power within the framing of START and Young Lyric programming.

## Chapter 4: Situating Lyric within the UK's creative and cultural landscape

2020 marked the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre<sup>11</sup>, designed by the well-known theatre architect, Frank Matcham. Matcham's London theatres include the Coliseum, Palladium, Victoria Palace, and Hackney Empire. The Lyric Music Hall opened in 1888 on Bradmore Grove, a short distance from the theatre's current location on King Street. It was then redesigned by Matcham, reopening in 1895, as The New Lyric Opera House and later renamed The Lyric Theatre (Lyric Hammersmith, 2021). In 1966, Matcham's theatre escaped demolition, instead being dismantled, and then rebuilt as Lyric Theatre Hammersmith at its current location on King Street, Hammersmith in 1975. Lyric's impressive 591-seat auditorium was further restored in 2018 and the building also holds a 120-seat studio theatre space. Lyric is West London's largest producing theatre.

Lyric is a registered company and charity (trading under the company name 'The Lyric Theatre Hammersmith Limited'), working under a Memorandum and Articles of Association, set out in 1975, with the aim to promote and provide:

- a) The advancement of the education of the public and in particular of persons living or working in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and in the West of London in the arts, including, but without limiting the foregoing, the arts of drama, ballet, mime, dance, music, singing and opera and for such purposes to establish operate and manage and administer the Company (including the main auditorium, studio theatre, and foyers thereof).
- b) The provision of facilities for recreation and other leisure time occupation for the public and in particular persons living and working in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham if such provision is in the interests of their social welfare within the meaning of the Recreational Charities Act 1958.  
(Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 1979)

Lyric achieves its aims by offering a full season of main house productions, including in-house and touring productions; Little Lyric productions for children in the Studio Theatre; an offering of theatre-based classes, workshops and opportunities for children and young people aged 0-25 in West London; and via its partners, further creative opportunities. Lyric's productions are contemporary in form and include a winter pantomime. Numerous Lyric (and co-produced) productions have been West End transfers, most recently the 2019 transfers of *Ghost Stories* and *Noises Off*. Lyric prides itself as being a place to learn and build experience in the industry, with many successful actors citing their time at Lyric as a defining moment in their career or as the first opportunity to be in a leading role. Such actors include: Hammed Animashaun (Lyric productions:

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<sup>11</sup> As noted in at the beginning of this thesis, I refer to Lyric Hammersmith Theatre as Lyric throughout for brevity.

*Bugsy Malone, Cinderella, Aladdin, Mogadishu*); Karl Queensborough (Lyric productions: *Aladdin, Jack and the Beanstalk*); Aneurin Barnard, Iwan Rheon, and Charlotte Wakefield, all appearing in Lyric's production of *Spring Awakening* (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2021b).

Following a £20m capital redevelopment project in 2015, Lyric expanded its footprint and now houses The Rueben Foundation Wing (RFW). The redevelopment provided space for Lyric to expand its after-school provision for children and young people, with additional rooms, and allowed Lyric to house partner organisations that fit within Lyric's charitable remit to provide educational and creative-based opportunities in West London. The RFW holds offices for Lyric staff and partner organisations, theatre and dance rehearsal spaces, music practice studios, a recording studio, tv and film studio, small cinema, and sensory room. The RFW also provides additional revenue through hire to visiting creative companies and corporate events. Lyric's partner organisations were selected in accordance with its key aims, as laid out in its 1975 Memorandum and Article of Association, and within its business plan objectives, working predominately with children and young people, making the RFW a hub in Hammersmith and Fulham for the next generation to grow their creative skills. As of January 2023, Lyric's seven partner organisations include:

- Action on Disability: a disabled people-led organisation managed and controlled by disabled people. The organisation works with young people aged 11-25, aiming to create opportunity and promote independence.
- Amici Dance Theatre Company: A resident company bringing disabled and non-disabled artists and performers together.
- DanceWest: a community dance organisation for West London providing dance classes led by experienced artists, community and schools' projects, and networking events for dance professionals.
- Musiko Musika: a music organisation providing children and young people with opportunities to learn about world music as they create and play music together.
- New English Ballet Theatre: a modern ballet producing company that additionally provides weekly classes for children and young people.
- Tri-borough Music Hub: the music education service for Kensington and Chelsea; Hammersmith and Fulham, and Westminster, working with schools, students, and the music professional workforce in the three local authorities.
- Turtle Key Arts: creative producers who aim to advance participation in the arts by disabled, disadvantaged, and socially excluded people.  
(Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2021c)

Pre-pandemic Lyric's annual reports suggest over 35,000 attendances in 2,500+ classes annually<sup>12</sup> (2018/19 annual report) through its partnership with the above organisations.

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<sup>12</sup> Deconstructing what is meant by '35,000+' attendances is discussed in Chapter 8. I suggest that transparency is used within reporting to account for the type of engagement.

### *Lyric as National Portfolio Organisation*

For over 20 years, Lyric has received annual funding from Arts Council England (ACE), as well as other varying funding streams including: funding for National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), capital projects, touring of productions, and other project-based work. Lyric has been an NPO since 2012 and was a Regularly Funded Organisation (NPOs predecessor) since 2003. NPOs are considered leaders in their field and hold a 'collective responsibility to protect and develop our national arts and cultural ecology' (Arts Council England, 2016, p. 5). NPOs develop individual objectives that are embedded in their organisational business plans and are used to monitor and evaluate progress across a funding cycle of three to five years. The current NPO portfolio for 2023-2026 has 990 arts organisations from across England. Following scrutiny of the level of investment dedicated to London-based organisations, the 2023-2026 portfolio saw significant changes to the funding allocated (Arts Council England, 2022b). £446m per annum has been invested in 78 cities and towns across England. In the 2018-2022 portfolio, 31% of funding went to London-based organisations, reduced to 16% in the most current 2023-2026 portfolio, and includes 61 new organisations in London (Arts Council England, 2022a). To achieve its levelling up agenda, ACE made radical shifts in the funding provided to existing organisations, with some seeing significant reduction in funding, even as levels of inflation rise, including the Southbank Centre and National Theatre, whilst others saw 100% cuts to their funding, including Hampstead Theatre, Donmar Theatre, and The Gate (Arts Council England, 2022b). In November 2022, Lyric was re-awarded NPO status at maintained levels from previous years. Whilst this level is difficult as inflation rises, it was the best possible outcome in the current economic climate.

ACE's 10-year strategy for 2020-2030, *Let's Create*, calls on its National Portfolio Programme to achieve its three outcomes of creative people, cultural communities, and a creative and cultural country. Underpinning these outcomes are ACE's investment principles of ambition and quality; inclusivity & relevance; dynamism; and environmental responsibility (Arts Council England, 2020). These outcomes and principles are refined from the earlier 2010-2020 strategy (Arts Council England, 2010) and reflect changing priorities, funding portfolios, and creative outputs in the sector. ACE's five goals set out in its 2010-2020 strategy are:

1. Excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums, and libraries.
2. Everyone has the opportunity to experience and be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries.
3. The arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable.
4. The leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled.

5. Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums, and libraries.  
(Arts Council England, 2010, p. 39)

As an NPO, Lyric embedded these goals in its business plan.

#### *Lyric's business plan 2018-2021*

The research period (2018-2022) for this thesis, sits predominately within Lyric's business plan (2018-2021). Lyric identified ten key business aims that reflect both its Memorandum and Articles of Association and ACE's strategy. For this case study, I focus on the aims connected to Lyric's participatory work with young people:

- To work in partnership to engage young people from West London – including those from socially excluded and disadvantaged backgrounds – in high quality, affordable activities in a wide range of artforms to help develop their creative, social, personal, and economic potential.
- To work with a range of educational institutions- with a particular focus on Hammersmith and Fulham schools – to deliver a top-quality creative education.  
(Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2020, p. 2)

I also consider objectives to strengthen Lyric's reputation in the heart of Hammersmith; nurturing a new diverse generation of theatre artists and the production of world-class theatre. Although not the focus of this thesis, as Lyric is now well into its 2022-2025 business plan, deep dives into impact across its current strategic aims would be beneficial. As developed further in Part 2, the shifting priorities of Lyric, wider cultural shifts, economic factors, and post-Covid recovery can alter strategy. Additionally, the change in artistic leadership in 2019, led to a new artistic vision, and a revised business plan to be inclusive of this vision and respond to significant changes due to Covid-19. Acknowledgement of these changes and understanding of impact is helpful to build more resilient futures. For example, strengthened understanding of Lyric's audiences (their motivations for attending, connections to the building and West London), through mapping and analysis of existing audiences, in connection to Lyric's key objectives, can illuminate Lyric's impact within specific areas of its work and connections with its audiences.

#### *Lyric Management and Team Structure*

The management and team structure of Lyric is similar to many arts organisations, especially those working under charitable and limited company structure overseen by a board of directors. Lyric's structure requires between ten and sixteen directors drawn from artistic and local organisations, with four current Councillors from the local authority, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2020). Across 2020 and 2021, work was undertaken to ensure

directors reflected greater diversity of skills and experience, providing stronger oversight for the theatre, resulting in a 14-member strong board.

Lyric is led by Rachel O’Riordan, Artistic Director and Chief Executive Officer, and Amy Belson, Executive Director. O’Riordan has been in post since 2019: having previously been Artistic Director at the Sherman Centre in Cardiff (2014-2018); Artistic Director at the Perth Theatre, Scotland (2011-2014); and co-founded Ransom Theatre Company in Belfast, leading the company from 2002-2011. Prior to O’Riordan’s arrival, Sean Holmes led the artistic vision for Lyric from 2009-2018. Key achievements during Holmes’s tenure as Artistic Director include his 2011 production of Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*, winning an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliated Theatre; a reinvented approach to theatre-making and theatre-going with *Secret Theatre*; the first stage version of *Bugsy Malone* in over a decade; and importantly, alongside Executive Director, Jessica Hepburn, the completion of the major redevelopment work (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2018b).

Amy Belson became Executive Director in July 2021, having acted as Interim Executive Director following the departure of Sian Alexander in February 2021. Amy previously was Lyric’s Director of Communications and Marketing (2018-2021) and has worked as Press Manager at Royal Shakespeare Company and Soho Theatre. Sian Alexander was Executive Director and joint CEO (2015- February 2021), having previously been a senior management consultant in the arts; Executive Director of the Bush Theatre; Associate Director of Julie’s Bicycle; and Head of Theatre in London at Arts Council England. Jessica Hepburn held the position of Executive Director from 2005-2015 and oversaw Lyric’s capital redevelopment project. Simon Mellor, currently Deputy Chief Executive for Arts Council England, held the position of CEO from 1995-2005.

O’Riordan and Belson are supported by a senior management team consisting of: Associate Director, Senior Producer, Director of Development, Director of Finance and Resources, Director of Communications and Sales, Head of Production, Commercial Director, and Director of Young Lyric. The senior management team oversee the day-to-day running and strategic planning of their departments. Lyric’s 2021 Annual Report puts the average number of employees for the 2020/21 financial year at 39 full-time and 43 part-time, down 27% from 2019/20 workforce figures. This significant drop in Lyric’s workforce is not unexpected, as Lyric, along with a vast majority of theatres and creative venues across the UK (and indeed the world), had to shut their doors due to the Covid pandemic in March 2020, with Lyric remaining closed to the public until June 2021 (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2021a).

### *Leadership of Young Lyric*

As this case study focuses on Lyric's work with young people, it is important to contextualise the Young Lyric department. As such, whilst I provide an overview of Lyric's wider organisational structure, funding, and priorities, I pause to highlight the structure of, and inner workings of, the Young Lyric department. Rob Lehmann is Director of Young Lyric and has been in post since January 2020. Lehmann was previously Head of Participation at the Young Vic (2015-2019) and has worked as a freelance theatre practitioner. Lehmann's role changed drastically in his initial months at Lyric as the theatre shut its doors due to Covid-19, moving his focus from strategic planning to developing creative strategies to continue reaching young people via alternative programming. Prior to Lehmann's appointment, Nicholai La Barrie led the department (2013-2019). After stepping down, he became an Artistic Associate and in July 2021, he became Lyric's Associate Director. La Barrie was instrumental in developing Lyric's vision for The Reuben Foundation Wing; developing and maintaining relationships with Lyric's partner organisations; creating new streams of work with and for young people; and ensuring creative pathways for young people were made available.

### *Staffing during Covid-19 closure*

The field research for this thesis took place across 2019-2022 and therefore needs to account for the precarious and unprecedented times due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Lyric took advantage of the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), placing 85% of permanent work staff and 100% of casual staff, on zero-hours contracts, on furlough from April 2020. During the first iteration of the furlough scheme, HMRC grants covered 80% of wages (up to £2,500 per month), with Lyric's Board of Governors extending a top-up pay for all employees to 90% through May 2020. This was followed by the reduction of Lyric's working days to four days per week and the standard 80% furlough payment made through October 2020. Lyric strategically used the addition of flexible furlough, introduced in July 2020, to keep staff working where appropriate, taking part in planning for Lyric's reopening, attending online team meetings, in-house training, and undertaking work for ongoing projects. Given the ongoing closure of the theatre, Lyric underwent a redundancy consultation period which resulted in some redundancies, the reformation of some roles, and in some cases, a reduction of hours. Throughout this time, the senior management team and selected vital roles, needed to keep the building operational, continued to work. Many of Lyric's core staff returned to remote working in late 2020 on flexi-furlough and continued to do so throughout the first five months of 2021. Lyric opened for the return of some staff and partners in April 2021. The number of employees and freelance staff at Lyric began to increase with Lyric full-time and part-time staff returning to work over a phase period from April-June 2021. Working on a phased return to the



office enabled employees to work in a blended model of home and office working, with most returning to more regular work patterns by November 2021.

Whilst it is not my intention to undertake a detailed analysis of Lyric's history as a theatre or its staffing structure, I provide this information to present the wider landscape of Lyric as a creative organisation, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Across the sector, the precarity of working within the arts resonated more strongly during this time. As Lyric emerged from Covid-19, attention was paid to the well-being of its staff and work on a 'Commitment to Change', defining and discussing how to be an actively anti-racist organisation. Looking more widely to the UK creative and cultural sector in 2021, research on changing perceptions of the sector highlighted the instability of employment, especially for those working in freelance capacities and early-career creatives during Covid-19. The structural inequalities within the sector were also made more evident as impacts of the pandemic were evaluated, including external assumptions of the sector as being elitist, inaccessible, and inequitable (Shaughnessy et al., 2022). Additionally, the closure of creative and cultural institutions highlighted the need to widen audiences and participation within the sector upon reopening. The sector continues to grapple with these highlighted points and encouraging growth, stability, and a welcoming atmosphere for those wanting to enter the industry. This can be evidenced in the influx and clearer signposting of opportunities for young people to hone their skills through training programmes, work experience and internships in the sector; including Lyric's SPRINGBOARD actor training programme for young people aged 18-25, who are underrepresented in theatre.

### *Financial portfolio*

Equally important in developing this picture is Lyric's financial structure, which underpins its objectives to provide entertainment, education, and creative opportunities for people in West London. Historically, Lyric's delivery model has been supported by its diverse income portfolio, heavily reliant on box office and trade income. Using the 2019/20 financial year as an example<sup>13</sup>, total income generated was £6,070,919. 50% of this income came from charitable activities (ticket sales, touring income, income from Lyric's partners, Young Lyric class fees, etc.); 30% from donations and legacies (core funding, trusts and foundations, individual donations, etc.); and 20% in other trading activities (commercial trading and corporate fundraising). For comparative analysis, the

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<sup>13</sup> I use 2019/20 figures as a representative of a 'typical' year for Lyric. Figures for 2020/21 and 2021/2022 reflect closure of the theatre, and 2022/23 whilst demonstrating a return to 'normal' are below that of a 'typical' year.

Young Vic Theatre seats 550 people (fractionally less than Lyric at 591 seats) and has a similar total income for the 2019/20 financial year of £6,766,863, yet its income portfolio differs with 49% of income derived from donations and legacies (although this percentage includes corporate funding, whereas Lyric attributes this to trade income), 46% from charitable activities, and 5% in other income. The Young Vic Theatre's higher income from donations and legacies is, in part, due to £660k more core funding from ACE, and over £550k more funds secured via trusts and foundations, individuals, and corporate sponsors. The Young Vic's additional income from fundraising is reflected in its annual expenditure towards its work with young people and other areas of investment.

Lyric's financial model is by no means unique amongst arts organisations and reflects the large cuts to public funding, support, and philanthropic giving following the financial crash in 2008, when many arts organisations moved towards a business model reliant on ticket sales, event hires, and catering. Samuel West, Chair of the National Campaign for the Arts suggests,

It is bitterly ironic that the arts sector's resourceful response to the 2008 financial crash is now the very thing that makes it vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis, with theatres closed and income from tickets and bars dropping off a cliff. Funders like Arts Council England are being proactive and helpful; now we need a commitment from the government to a rescue plan and a public funding package that will enable our sector to service the shutdown. (For the Arts, 2021).

In July 2020, the government's response to the crisis facing the creative and culture sector was the rollout of a £1.57b Culture Recovery Fund. This fund was managed by ACE, delivering three rounds of funding for creative and cultural organisations that were in imminent risk of failure, with over 5,000 creative and cultural organisations benefitting from the fund. Whilst this funding was much needed, not all applying organisations were able to receive funding and, for many, it did little to stem the flow of expenditure needed to keep afloat. The Office for National Statistics reported a '44.5% reduction in monthly gross domestic product (GDP) output (according to gross value added (GVA)) in the three months up to June 2020 compared with the three months earlier, making it one of the sectors worst hit by the pandemic', with accommodation and food seeing a higher reduction at 86.7% (Tobin, 2020). Whilst the latter half of 2021 saw venues opening their doors, the British public remained cautious about returning to public venues.

The Audience Agency's Cultural Participation Monitor was developed as part of their work on Covid-19 Impact Research with the Centre for Cultural Value, running a series of surveys, in what they refer to as 'waves', with the seventh wave in autumn 2022 (The Audience Agency, 2022). The survey addressed changing attitudes towards how people viewed and consumed creativity and culture.

Although a relatively small sample size, wave seven saw 3,557 responses, highlighting that attitudes towards Covid have softened and people were feeling more confident in attending public events, with a rise to 90% of respondents reporting attendance at creative and cultural events. Looking at figures from 12 months prior, only 29% of respondents even felt 'happy to attend' an event. Whilst a welcomed increase in attendance, the 2023 cost-of-living crisis means that 92% 'intend[ed] to scale back on entertainment spend outside of the home' in the months ahead, highlighting yet another precarious year for creative and cultural venues. Funding from government aided in keeping creative and cultural organisations afloat during the pandemic, yet its short-sighted and reactive approach has not considered the lasting impacts of the pandemic, nor begun to address the cost-of-living crisis and its ramifications for the sector.

Lyric benefitted from the available government schemes, including Cultural Recovery Fund and Coronavirus related funding during 2020/21. As expected, Lyric's income was significantly reduced in 2020/21 (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, p. 18) due to the closure of the theatre and lost revenue, with 89% of income derived from grants totalling £3,193,011; donations contributing 6%; trade activities at 4%; and ticket sales and interest bringing in 1% of total income. The below table (Figure 2) illustrates Lyric's income and expenditure over a 17-year period, demonstrating a steady increase of income and corresponding expenditure whilst also showing a sufficient increase in its yearly balance brought forward. 2021/22 saw movement back towards diversification of income streams that included ticket sales. Figures for 2021/22 reflect closure of the building for Quarter 1 and account for audience hesitancy in returning to public spaces, changing guidelines and restrictions, and reduced trade.

## Lyric Income & Expenditure 2005-2022

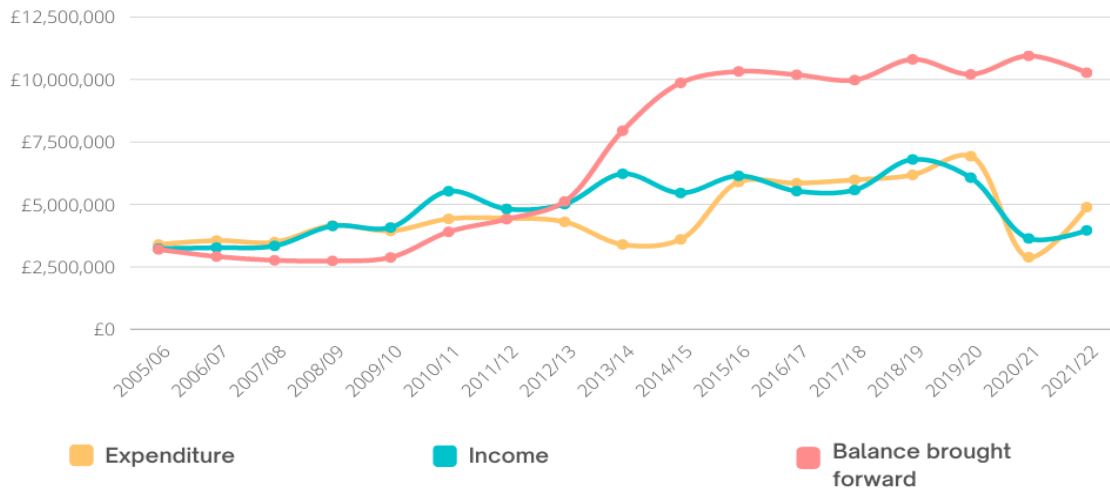


Figure 2

Whilst Lyric’s reserves are adequate, given the precarious nature of attendance and changing priorities of funders, there is a need to ensure growth of reserves for years ahead. Using figures from the 2020/21 report, total funds carried forward were £10,947,875, of which £8,229,693 were restricted funds for refurbishment and capital extension projects. The unrestricted funds of £2,718,182, saw £548,435 as general funds. As per Lyric’s reserves policy, at least three months of average staff and overhead expenses should be in reserve, including salaries currently costed at an estimated £700,000, leaving a £100k+ shortfall.

This chapter provided a synopsis of Lyric’s key aims and objectives and situated Lyric within the wider context of the creative and cultural sector in the UK as the foundation for this critical case study. It linked key goals of ACE funding to Lyric’s strategic plans and began to define its relationship with West London and young people. The redevelopment of the building and opening of The Reuben Foundation Wing in 2015 provided the opportunity for Lyric to engage many more young people in creative activities, delivering on its NPO funding and strategic aims. In the following chapters, I interrogate how Lyric delivers on these aims.

## Chapter 5: Lyric's participatory arts programming with and for young people

In this chapter I provide a condensed account of Lyric's work with young people from 2005/06 to 2022/23, to demonstrate the breadth and reach of work undertaken by the department with and for young people in West London. Throughout this discussion, organisational changes in key priorities, objectives, leadership, and funding are used to situate Lyric's work with young people whilst also acknowledging social, political, and economic shifts, and subsequent movement within educational and creative sector priorities.

There is evidence of participatory work with young people taking place at Lyric since the early 1990s, although it has proved difficult to pinpoint the inception of this as a specific strand of work. I selected 2005/06 as the starting point for analysis to coincide with the pilot programme of Lyric's longest running and flagship programme START, providing creative engagement for young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Lyric's work with children and young people has changed in name across this time, starting as 'Creative Learning', moving to 'Young People's Programme', and in 2019 renamed as 'Young Lyric'. For clarity, this work is referred to as 'Young Lyric' throughout. The structure of the department, delivery models, and content explored has also undergone considerable change, moving from a project-based approach to strands of work, including open access classes for all young people; schools-based programming; inclusion and outreach programmes; and training for emerging artists. In addition to the participatory programme, Lyric is also committed to providing opportunities for children and young people to experience live theatre, including children's theatre productions in Lyric's Studio Theatre, in partnership with visiting theatre companies, and an annual pantomime in its main theatre. This annual event is well attended by local schools, with Year 5 and 6 classes in Hammersmith and Fulham allocated free tickets. Additionally, free tickets for all 'First Night' performances are provided for Hammersmith and Fulham residents. These opportunities are, for many children and young people in the borough, their first (and sometimes only) experience of live theatre. The following chronological history focuses on experiences *with* and *for* young people, omitting experiences where the focus was on viewing theatre productions alone.

### Shifting priorities: creating opportunities for children and young people

With the arrival of New Labour in 1997, the creative and cultural sector received a new and vital boost. Prime Minister Tony Blair tasked the government with the reorganisation of the Department of National Heritage into the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), and formation of the Creative Industries Task Force. This gave rise to a greater focus on policy generation and the

impact of the creative economy. In 1998, the task force published the *Creative Industries Mapping Document*, which Baroness Bull suggests ‘... changed forever the discourse around the creative and cultural sectors and the ways in which they generate and deliver value’ (Gross, 2020, p. 1). As highlighted in Chapter 1, whilst the discourse may have evolved, these conversations continue, with differing perspectives on how value and impact is defined.

Subsequent to the *Creative Industries Mapping Document*, Sir Ken Robinson led a national commission into creativity, education, and the economy. The resulting report, *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (Robinson, 1999) lobbied for the rollout of a national strategy for creative and cultural education. The report put forward a series of recommendations to enhance young people’s experiences in the arts, unlocking their creative potential and building cultural understanding. These recommendations included creative partnership between schools and arts organisations, as well as enhanced arts-based learning in the classroom. With New Labour’s backing, the creative, cultural, and education sectors of the early 2000s championed creativity, providing opportunities for children and young people to explore the world around them through the arts and widening access to arts and culture.

With a revitalised interest in both the instrumental and intrinsic value of the arts, substantial investment in cultural learning started to take shape. In 2001, DCMS funded national museums were made free for all, making culture more accessible for families. Across 2000-2005, ACE developed two long standing initiatives: Artsmark, as a quality assurance mark for schools, and Arts Award, providing children and young people with qualifications for their arts learning. Simultaneously, key initiatives to strengthen skills, knowledge, and opportunities in the creative and cultural sector were formed. These initiatives included the Creative and Cultural Skills Council, to support the creative workforce, and Museums, Libraries and Archives, which launched its much-used cultural learning framework, *Inspired Learning for All* (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2021).

The early 2000s additionally saw an investment in addressing the well-being of children and young people. This new focus was, in part, due to the 2000 public inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, who, at the age of nine, was tortured and murdered by her great-aunt and her great-aunt's boyfriend. The inquiry, referred to as *The Laming Report* (Laming, 2003) highlighted for the first time the failings of the many organisations and agencies who were there to protect Victoria. The report identified areas in need of improvement and reform surrounding childcare and improving the quality of life for young people, creating five key outcomes for the well-being of children and young people:

being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and economic well-being (DfES, p. 14). The report led to the reformation of the 1998 Children Act, revised into The Children Act of 2004. The Children Act's five outcomes for all children and young people reflect those of *The Laming Report*: to be protected from neglect and harm; have the right to education, training, and recreation; physical, mental, and emotional well-being; contribute to society; and achieve social and economic well-being (DfES, 2003, p. 14). The 2003 *Every Child Matters* (DfES) report addresses similar points, asserting that every child, regardless of background, should be given support throughout their life. Through influential reports and the government's new invested interest in the arts, new funding streams opened from trusts and foundations, as well as governmental schemes, seeking to improve the social, personal and educational development of children and young people through creative engagements.

Lyric's strategic planning across 2005-2010 reflects the significant learning found in the reports and responds to specific governmental priorities where grants were made available. Incidentally, 2005 also saw changes in the leadership of Lyric, with the appointment of David Farr as Artistic Director and Jessica Hepburn as Executive Director, with both acting as Joint Chief Executives. A feasibility study on the creation of a creative learning space was undertaken in 2005, advocating for dedicated space to advance the development of talent and potential of young people in West London. Following precedent set by other arts organisations undertaking capital development projects in the early 2000s, Lyric ensured ample staffing to develop and deliver programming and create a case for support ahead of a capital campaign, with Young Lyric's appointment of two co-directors and two producers, a significant staffing increase at the time. Lyric's 2005/06 annual report demonstrates a change in priority, highlighting, for the first time, an ambition to 'to devise and deliver a high-quality programme of creative learning activities for young people in West London which offer opportunities for them to participate in the arts to develop their personal, social, educational, and creative potential' (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2006, p. 3). This changing language towards the 'personal' and 'social' is reflective of changing sector focus, but also points towards a focus on the instrumental value of creative engagement.

From 2005 to 2010, Lyric heavily invested in the vision of Young Lyric through a robust fundraising campaign that resulted in solid backing from public funders, trusts, and foundations, towards work with young people. Three-year funding from John Lyons Charity and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and £160+ in funding over two years from London West Learning & Skills Council was secured. Young Lyric developed new programming and expanded the reach of existing programmes, working with

over 5,000 young people across the year<sup>14</sup>. Programming included a partnership with a local primary and secondary school to provide a sustained programme of arts activity; a project for unemployed refugee artists to train as artist-in-residence education practitioners; and the launch of START, working with young people who were not in education or employment (2006, p. 4). Whilst such programming has become more prevalent in theatres, the breadth of delivery in 2005 was unique.

In subsequent years, revised language in annual reports suggests a real awareness and understanding of the political, educational, and creative sector priorities:

‘a comprehensive programme of activities linked to our productions which are aimed at helping schools to deliver the National Curriculum. We also run a wide-ranging programme of activities outside school hours for young West Londoners of all backgrounds which help them to learn new skills, make new friends, gain qualifications and work.  
(Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2007, p. 4)

The connection to the national curriculum was key to attracting schools in the 2000s, providing assurance that engagement could be used to validate a given curriculum point that needed covering within the school week. Programming also considered anti-social behaviour and responded with a Saturday drama club for at risk young people, taking place a time where anti-social behaviour was prevalent. A dedicated group of young people aged 11-19 was also recruited, known as the Lyric Ambassadors, who attended bi-monthly meetings to advise on Lyric’s future. Programming reflected the guiding frameworks and recommendations put forward in Extended School reforms, *Every Child Matters*, and *Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto* (DfES, 2006). This careful attention to education reform, expertise in engaging arts in the classroom, and a desire to develop sustainable programming supported Lyric’s public funding bids. Although limited data was available, monitoring and evaluation of Young Lyric programming during this time appears carefully considered, erring on the quantitative side to fulfil the remit of the government funding reports. Whilst an evaluation framework or strategy wasn’t found in my search of Lyric’s files, funding proposals and reports were available and demonstrated an understanding of baseline and summative change from an organisational perspective, supported by anecdotal evidence from participants.

Continuing to innovate, Young Lyric tested a new model of engagement with local audiences in 2006/07, utilising a £170K funding package made possible ahead of the Olympics. *Torch* was a new programme for 14–19-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds providing part-time courses,

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<sup>14</sup> It is unclear in the reporting of participant statistics what constituted ‘working with’ a young person. This is most likely a combination of light touch, one-off sessions such as school visits, to in-depth projects working with young people over a series of months.



resulting in Community Volunteering, Arts Award, and Open College Network qualifications (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2007, p. 6). This secured funding led to Lyric being acknowledged by LBHF as a key provider of accredited education and learning, as part of its 14-19 Education Strategy, and accessed funding from LBHF services including Youth Offending, Adult Learning and Skills, Youth Service, Connexions, and Primary Gifted and Talented departments. Participation in programming increased by 36%, working with 9,500 young people<sup>15</sup>.

In December 2007, New Labour published *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures*. The plan aimed 'to make England the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up' (DfES, 2007, p. 14), whilst also continuing the key objectives of *Every Child Matters*. The plan highlighted steps to achieve better schools: involving parents in children's learning, as well as providing places for children to play, learn, and explore outside of school. The plan noted the need for Post-16 education and training. Lyric actively addressed the government's agenda with refined programming and increased participation. It also produced a schools' project linked to its production of *Spring Awakening*.

2008 saw the excessive risk taking of financial institutions reach its climax with the collapse of Lehman Brothers, leading to a global recession. In the UK, over a million people lost their jobs as businesses shut down. Whilst the impact of this collapse was felt immediately by some in the creative sector, the impact on Lyric remained soft during this financial year, with stronger than expected box office income, offsetting the small shortfall in achieving its fundraising targets. In January 2009, Sean Holmes became Artistic Director, bringing with him a new artistic vision for Lyric. Young Lyric noted further work with the Youth Offending Service and a well-rounded programme for young people to learn about backstage roles. The number of 'opportunities to participate' fell to 28,304 in 2008/09 (a 41% decrease from the previous year)<sup>16</sup>. This significant decrease in participation is not explained, although the revenue funding for the department decreased by 32%,

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<sup>15</sup> As with the 2005/06 participant figures, the make-up of participants and experiences undertaken with Lyric is unclear. This becomes more pronounced in further annual accounts, where number of participants are no longer noted, and attendances are used. There are also discrepancies between yearly totals and the increase/decrease in overall participation.

<sup>16</sup> Lyric's data collection of participant statistics changed numerous times across 2005-2018, making direct comparison of participation complex. Whilst they began with collect total number of participants, this soon changed into 'opportunities to participate' and some years, 'number of sessions undertaken'. Regardless of year, the tracking of individual participants is unknown (for example, 1 participant taking part in 3 classes, in most years would be counted as 3 people). In reviewing data from 2018-2021, data is mined for a complete and accurate number of individuals taking part yet is still difficult to confirm.

suggesting that the large-scale projects that had ceased accounted for this decrease in participation. (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2010, p. 11)

2010 saw drastic changes to the creative sector with the introduction of the Coalition Government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats and the 2010 Spending Review. ACE funding was reduced by 30% and DCMS by 25% (HM Treasury, 2010). The government additionally set out a 26% reduction to local government expenditure by 2014-15, which was then reduced by another 1% in 2014-15, and 10% in 2015-16, reaching 37% by 2015-16 (Harvey, 2016, p. 7). Consequently, local authority funding towards culture and housing was greatly reduced. Harvey reports between 2010-2015, local authority spending declined by 16.6% towards the arts and culture (theatres, museums and galleries, and library services), observing, '[i]n fact, the biggest surprise is that the rate of reduction is lower than that for spending overall, which suggests that councils have tried to protect these services where they can' (p. 9). Similarly, *Art Index 2020* suggests a 43% decrease in local authority arts funding between 2007 and 2018. Whilst Lyric's funding from LBHF remained in 2010/11, it was drastically reduced in subsequent years.

Young Lyric responded to changing funding priorities through refinement of its project portfolio, creating three strands of work, which reflected previous years, but with a distinctive focus on building pathways between projects, allowing participants opportunities to continue their creative journey at Lyric and beyond:

- Lyric Young Company, activities for West London young people outside of school. New additions included masterclasses on audition skills, weekly singing and writing workshops, and projects during school holidays.
- Creative Learning, a programme for schools and colleges. This encompassed career days, work experience, theatre career discussions, and workshops connected to main house productions.
- Targeted Work, programming for the most at-risk young people. START continued as a flagship project. This was joined by a further project with the Local Offending Service, a project for young fathers to devise and record an audiobook for their children, and taster sessions.

Funding was still churning for Young Lyric, although the large, multi-year grants decreased until 2012 when Lyric was awarded £160K from ACE towards its work with young people in addition to its NPO funding. LBHF reduced annual funding by £120K from Autumn 2011 and project-based funding streams, with just £230K per annum from LBHF towards core funding being awarded by 2013/14. This reduction was partially offset by the Council's commitment to contribute to Lyric's Capital Project (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2012, p. 13).

Young Lyric programming continued to respond to the needs of the community, including a new schools' partnership programme with three West London schools; entrance into National Theatre Connections by the Young Lyric Company; and a programme of learning via Virtual Schools for looked after children. 2011/12 also saw the inclusion of a focused offer for young adults' training and employment in the creative industries. As part of a funded programme by Paul Hamlyn, Young Artistic Associates addressed the lack of diversity in Lyric's staff and provided employment opportunities. Whilst this programme was present in previous years, with proper financial backing, it became a strategic strand of Young Lyric, providing paid positions and strengthening the pathways available into employment in the creative industries. Young Lyric continued to reflect its position as an ACE Associate Bridge Organisation through 2014. Associate Bridge Organisations acted as centres of best practice and engagement with young people, making themselves available for discussion with other local creative organisations. Young Lyric strengthened connections with Hammersmith and Fulham schools, delivering bespoke schools' workshops and a year-long project with five primary schools introducing children to theatre. Renewed programming with the Westminster and Hammersmith Young Offending Teams took place, working with 18 young people on reparation orders to explore restorative justice through drama. Lyric also launched REWIND, an early intervention project for young people aged 14-16 at risk of exclusion, which has continued annually.

In the year leading up to the reopening of the theatre and the RFW (2014/15), ongoing programming continued, even as the building became a construction site. Other programmes included: *Future Fest*, a year-long festival, which brought 153 young people together to create a cross-artform project; a European Exchanges project where 12 Young Lyric Company members completed an exchange programme with young people in the Netherlands, projects with Tri-Borough Alternative Provision; a Summer Arts College for Young Offenders; a Young Ensemble main house show; and Masterclass Programme to give young artists access to industry knowledge and contacts. The breadth of work was varied and had young people at its core, working through an array of forms addressing instrumental and intrinsic value of the arts.

Lyric reopened with its new RFW in August 2015, welcoming young people and its core delivery partners to the building. A change in leadership also took place in 2015, with Nicholai La Barrie taking on the role of Director of Young People and Sian Alexander as Executive Director. Under La Barrie's leadership, Young Lyric underwent strategic change to utilise the new spaces. Young Lyric strands of work were realigned, allowing projects to take place as standalone experiences, but also providing cross-over and the building of pathways through Lyric. The vision for Young Lyric was of

young people taking part in an after-school drama class, seamlessly transitioning onto other projects and opportunities at Lyric, as a Young Associate, or having their first paid theatre job on Lyric's mainstage; and of young people taking part in more targeted projects such as START moving into further classes or work experience. As the building reopened with additional space for classes, the messaging surrounding young people's work changed, asserting: 'We do powerful work with young people, many from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring that the arts are open to all' (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2016, p. 5). The offer made available for marginalised and disadvantaged young people or number of participants had not increased from previous years, yet funders' priorities had shifted towards more refined work with specific communities. This focus on marginalised and disadvantaged young people fed into La Barrie's strengthened focus on the development of young people's artistic craft, providing young people with professional training and employment in the creative industries in subsequent years. Consequently, there was an increase in opportunities for young people to gain vital experience towards creative career pathways including: young people being cast in main house productions, apprenticeships occurring across Lyric's departments, and more young people taking part in Young Lyric's Alumni Scheme. The Alumni Scheme provided training in assisting in drama workshops, first aid and health and safety, and career guidance. Inclusive pathways were evidenced as three START graduates joined the front of house team for the holiday season.

In 2015, ACE changed its approach to what it referred to as Bridge Organisations, offering further structure and support to the creative and education sector, seeing ACE and DfES invest £10m a year to ten Bridge Organisations (Arts Council England, 2021). Bridge Organisations are split into regions across the UK, with *A New Direction* leading the way in London. Bridge Organisations were tasked with the promotion of Local Cultural Education Partnerships (LCEPs), providing funding, guidance, and networking in specific areas. In London, this was achieved by borough specific LCEPs. There are over 100 LCEPs across England, each developing their own agenda, but all united in supporting children and young people to fulfil their creative potential through access to high-quality arts experiences. Lyric secured funding from *A New Direction*, from 2018-2021, to become the leading organisation for the LBHF's LCEP. LBHF's LCEP sought to connect schools and creative organisations in the borough through brokering relationships and providing teacher CPDs, alongside a Schools Charter, encouraging schools to consider the creative and cultural offer they provided pupils.

LBHF's LCEP via Lyric was not without issue due to the tensions between the organisational objectives of Lyric, that of leading a borough-wide initiative that was about brokering relationships,

and as a partner organisation within the LCEP. These tensions were coupled with Covid-19 restrictions and staff on furlough for over 12 months of the three-year funding cycle. From the onset, the strategic leadership for LBHF's LCEP, was to be handed over to LBHF's Learning Partnership at the end of the three-year funding cycle, with the intent to remove the tensions between organisational and initiative objectives. In the 18 months following this handover, there has been sparse engagement with schools and arts organisations at a borough-wide strategic level connected to the LCEP, yet a new LBHF arts strategy is currently in a consultation phase. It is hoped that some of the LCEP's key objectives will find their way into this strategy as it is disappointing to see the foundational work that Lyric led, along with a few key partners, reach a standstill. Although, it is not surprising given funding for LCEPs has now drawn to a close. The impact of reduction and loss of funding for such initiatives cannot be ignored. It will be interesting to see in the next few years how LCEPs across the country maintain and expand levels of partnership working between the creative and cultural sector and schools. In some instances, strong models have been put in place such as the London Borough of Lambeth's LCEP, which has been absorbed by the Council's ELEVATE programme. ELEVATE aims to open up the creative and cultural industries for every child and young person in the borough and has developed a strong model of working groups with teachers, creative leads, and industry partners who co-create and deliver content in the borough (Lambeth Council, 2022).

Following capital redevelopment, Lyric entered a few years of consolidation of programmes, where the team worked to achieve its aims and plan for its future using the new space available. With the opening of the Reuben Foundation Wing, ACE recognised Lyric for their 'strategic sectoral role in creating alternative pathways into the arts for young people' (p. 5). The schools' work returned, rolling out an ambitious programme to engage with all schools in Hammersmith and Fulham during the year, and to work in long-term strategic partnerships with specific schools. Whilst data suggests engagement occurred via workshops, tours, taster sessions, post-show talks, free and reduced tickets, enrichment activities, and bespoke creative activity days, the impact of these is unknown due to a lack of robust data.

Young Lyric's work with marginalised and disadvantaged young people continued with START, reaching its tenth anniversary in 2016, in addition to REWIND and a series of projects with Virtual Schools for looked-after children. Across 2015-2017, there was a dedicated focus on young people as individuals, their growth with apprenticeships and work experience, and the recruitment of six global majority graduates to year-long internships with funding from Creative Access. Young Lyric's

Alumni scheme saw 26 young people take part in paid training and employment, demonstrating a strong connection between engagement in the arts and future employment during this time. The Alumni scheme continued to run from 2018, with a much smaller cohort. The young people taking part in the scheme were provided furlough during the pandemic. With the reopening of the theatre, Lyric selected to not restart the Young Lyric Alumni scheme, allowing the Young Lyric Team time to evaluate how they wished to work with participants on completion of a project. Lyric Ensemble was piloted as a training programme for emerging theatre performers aged 18-25 between 2017-2019, seeing an ensemble of 15 young people devise and produce a piece of theatre in Lyric's Studio Theatre over nine months.

Researching Young Lyric's 2005-2018 programming, its reach, and impact proved difficult due to lack of consistent data, or indeed any data in some instances. An annual account might highlight successes and give a few statistics, yet, when reviewing Lyric's files, very few corresponding notes, figures, case studies, or quotes could be found to support these claims. Furthermore, the cessation of specific projects or initiatives is often not noted, with valuable information housed within the memories of staff. Given the continued turnover of staff, the collation of information is very much needed as a record to build upon. Through conversation and review of existing documentation, it is evident that most often programmes concluded because the specified funding stream reached its end. Other projects, whilst not always a primary focus for Lyric continued, as they were attractive to funders, including START and REWIND, which work with specific communities that funders had identified as key areas they wished to support.

It is during the 2018/19 financial year that I arrived at Lyric to undertake my research. There is a definitive shift within this chapter from herein, as I present Young Lyric's activities through a more personal connection and include observation and first-hand experience to contextualise the narrative, whereas the journey from 2005-2018 was based on review of documentation and discussion with staff and participants. Lyric's reporting notes financial challenges across 2018/19, due to the summer closure of the theatre for refurbishment, as well as fundraising proving difficult in a 'increasingly competitive climate' (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2019, p. 8). This trend of a 'competitive climate' continues into present day. As example, expenditure for the department for 2019/20 was £572k, plus staffing of £248k, with an income of circa £370k towards Young Lyric's work via class fees, workshops, including circa £200k in project-based grants. In previous years, grants towards Young Lyric's work appear to have covered or positively contributed towards the expenditure of delivery activity and staff costs. By 2018/19 this underpinning project grant and

funding toward the core Young Lyric team decreased substantially, moving towards a model of Young Lyric's work being subsidised by core funding, ticket sales and other income to support the charitable work of the department. As the funding climate became more competitive, there were also changes in staffing of the development department. The current Director of Development came in during the mid-2020 pandemic lockdown, and the Development team member responsible for trust and foundation applications left in early 2021. This position was without a full-time staff member until September 2022, having a profound impact on Lyric's ability to put forward funding proposals and develop new relationships with funders. Notwithstanding, the lack of a dedicated Development Manager for Trusts and Foundations, the Development and Young Lyric teams collaboratively put forward proposals for a new theatre training initiative in 2021. They secured multi-year funding (circa £250k), demonstrating the ability to work strategically and develop a new initiative that serves as a pathway for a small number of START participants. As outlined below, although Young Lyric's programming has been refined, it is not always reflective of current funding priorities and intended outcomes. On one hand, it can be argued that Lyric is presenting a case for grounding their programming in accumulated knowledge in-house as to what works best to continue engagement with young people. On the other hand, being open to creating new opportunities for engagement that are reflective of current funding priorities brings new energy and ways of working into an organisation, allowing opportunity to connect with other organisations and develop best practice. Indeed, some of Young Lyric's programmes stretched across both approaches, whereas others are firmly entrenched in historic ways of working. A strengthened and more diverse funding portfolio complemented by holistic development of initiatives is needed to ensure programme sustainability.

Across 2018 and 2019, there was considerable change within the Young Lyric team. Within a nine-month period, all three of the full-time Young Lyric Producers moved onto new roles, taking with them years of experience and knowledge on the inner workings of Lyric (producers had nine years, six years, and three years' service at Lyric respectively). This was followed by the departure of Young Lyric's Director, Nicholai La Barrie, in November 2019. This considerable upheaval in the team disrupted progress for the department and, whilst programming for young people was maintained, there was little growth in vision or new opportunity outside of the development work for the LCEP. New producers were brought on board, yet, as with any new role, it takes time to understand the depth of programming. Around the same time, Lyric welcomed Rachel O'Riordan as Artistic Director in February 2019. O'Riordan set about creating her artistic vision for the theatre which began with the development of a new artistic season for 2019/20.

When Rob Lehmann joined as Director of Young Lyric in January 2020, he set about understanding the work of the department, observing workshops, meeting with stakeholders, including Lyric's partner organisations, funders, LBHF, and importantly the Young Lyric team. Lehmann identified the need for a refined strategy towards Young Lyric's work that reflected the new vision of the Artistic Director, whilst also achieving the key objectives set out in the 2018-2022 business plan. Lehmann had been in post just ten weeks when Lyric was forced to close due to Covid-19. When the government's furlough scheme began, Lehmann continued working at 4 days a week with only a 3-week furlough. His responsibilities moved from strategic planning and reimagining the work Lyric produced with young people, to managing the difficult situation Lyric and the entire arts community found itself in. The Young Lyric team, with exception of Lehmann, were furloughed for most of the 2020/21 financial year. Due to the closure of schools, Lehmann moved to producing a small number of online projects and developing a few projects in the community; including a playwriting project led by Lyric Associate, Simon Stephens, with a group of keyworkers' children. Fundraising during this time was crisis focused, with funds received towards cultural recovery and a reopening phase. The funds that were secured towards work with young people were allocated towards projects that were run via online platforms or reallocated following conversations with funders. Across the first half of 2021, Young Lyric continued to run digital projects with schools due to Covid-19 restrictions, including *Stories of the Future*, working with six secondary schools. Artists worked online with schools to provide artistic stimulus and guidance on writing monologues, which were then filmed by actors at home and redistributed to the schools. When restrictions lifted, Young Lyric renewed its commitment to working with young people in West London, producing REWIND at a local Secondary School Pupil Referral Unit. Given the instability of Covid-19 and changing restrictions, Young Lyric continued to run some online projects, including a series of directing masterclasses, and an international digital theatre project, funded by the British Council, exploring Black Lives Matter in conversation with other young people, expanding understanding of the issues at play from wider perspectives.

With the reopening of the building to the public in June 2021, Young Lyric began inviting young people back indoors, commencing with START in summer 2021. Classes resumed in October, and by January 2022, most programming had fully resumed. Although tentative in launching new initiatives due to concern over further Covid-19 restrictions, Young Lyric pushed on delivering REWIND within two local primary pupil referral units, two further START projects, schools' workshops, an online LCEP conference, and a host of after-school classes. Lyric also undertook its first community production, *Heart of Hammersmith*, an intergenerational piece developed with 56 participants, aged



11-88. Young Lyric's main achievement was the launch of its SPRINGBOARD programme in January 2022, providing 10 young people, aged 18-25, with a two-year programme of masterclasses and paid work in Lyric productions, welcoming three past START participants to the 2022 cohort.

The entanglements between strategic priorities, delivery models, and funding highlighted within this case study are representative of many arts organisations. For Lyric, the shift towards a refined artistic vision and business plan brought in with new leadership took time to develop and time to be fully adopted by staff. Capturing such shifts would be advantageous for Lyric and other arts organisations; through evaluation, reflective discussion or circulated documentation. Creating a body of evidence that can be referred to and passed on to new leadership, would allow for deeper historical knowledge and support future work. This includes expanding on internal reasons for change, noting if they are based on leadership agendas, priority areas, economic reasons, or more external factors for change, such as a desire to seek funding towards other priorities, or responding to political and educational agendas. As example, documentation to support and explain Young Lyric's significant shift, in 2018/19, away from pathways into general employment as the desired outcome, delivered through Lyric's Alumni programme, towards the development of creativity and talent of local young people, would have been useful. Existing reporting, strategy, and internal documentation does not illuminate why this shift occurred, yet it was deliberate, as advocating for sustaining the model was not actioned in further funding proposals. This shift away from providing employment pathways, especially internal employment, happened subtly over the next few years. This was partly due to high staff turnover, who took with them historical knowledge of what was offered to participants post-project. It also appears that some existing staff did not fully understand shifting priorities or why specific initiatives were wound down. These ongoing changes permeated Lyric and resulted in an undercurrent of dissatisfaction amongst some staff and young people who expected these opportunities to be present. These changes are further illuminated in Chapter 6.

A strategic three-year plan (2022-2024) for Young Lyric was developed, addressing programming in connection to Lyric's key business aims. The main shifts within Young Lyric's work included artistic response to main house productions within Young Lyric's work and an overall focus on talent development and in-house pathways. The new pathways are intentionally internal and suggest scalable learning with young people, progressing onto further classes with Young Lyric and, where applicable, auditioning for SPRINGBOARD as a performance training experience. Lyric's model diverges from many organisational routes within the wider sector who are adopting a broader partnership approach, signposting participants to further opportunities with external partners post-

engagement. If this shift is to be successful, Young Lyric's revision of existing programming and careful consideration of impact needs to take place. Conversely, Lyric's development of its SPRINGBOARD programme aims to assist in diversifying talent within the creative workforce, specifically onstage in theatre. As part of this initiative, Lyric will disseminate its findings of the two-year pilot programme. This shift serves the vision of Lyric and has potential to act as a catalyst for change in diversifying the industry, a robust strategy for disseminating findings, and an engagement of the sector in further discussions of how to implement change, from within organisational vision. Furthermore, reflecting on changing priorities highlighted within the creative, cultural, and education sectors may provide a useful foundation from which to advocate for alternative opportunities such as SPRINGBOARD.

### START: Lyric's flagship programme

START is Young Lyric's longest running programme, running annually since 2005, reaching over 400 young people. In this section, I provide an overview of the programme, across its 18-year history, through review of annual accounts, funding proposals, internal documents, and discussions to develop a baseline of the programme's delivery model. START's underpinning aims and objectives have reflexively altered to meet the needs of young people and respond to changing focuses in arts-based practice and funding priorities. This review is used as the foundation for ethnographic research presented in subsequent chapters, to define the programme's impact for participants taking part from 2018-2021.

During the 2005 pilot of START, it was described as a 'project aimed at young people aged 13-19 years old who are not in education and employment which uses the arts as a medium for helping participants to gain formal qualifications in literacy and numeracy' (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2006, p. 5). The programme was financially well supported, having received £160K in funding from the London West Learning & Skills Council for two years. Annually, the programme aimed to work with 10-14 young people on a project, with three projects per year, reaching 30-40 young people per annum. The course ran over six weeks, with a full week devoted to coursework and preparing for a literacy and numeracy test which was required to receive a City and Guilds Literacy and Numeracy qualification. In 2006/07, Lyric reported delivering '200 nationally recognised qualifications, 65 of which have been in literacy and numeracy and ESOL' (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2011, p. 2) and a 95% pass rate on a literacy and numeracy qualification the following year. Evidence suggests robust post-project pathways for participants, with 50 work placements at Lyric and a further 40 in the local business community, although the depth and length of engagement cannot be qualified. 2007

reporting saw 75% of START participants progressing into employment, training, or further education (with 50% in structured learning and 25% in employment). The excellent pass rate and successful pathways indicate a strong understanding of the barriers young people were facing in developing positive next steps for themselves, as well as a dedicated delivery team who wanted to ensure future successes for participants. Lyric's reporting in 2008 suggests START is highlighted in a 'forthcoming government publication as an example of best practice in re-engaging young people who are not in education, training or employment' (p. 3). Regrettably, I was unable to locate the publication.

The programme structure included a taster week, introducing participants to a variety of artforms; two weeks of artform skills development, which covered a variety of artforms including film and carnival; a week of literacy and numeracy development; followed by a week where participants created an arts-based piece to share and prepared for a performance exam. The final week explored creative careers and progression into employment, education, or training. The participants were supported by a large staff, including a project manager, two artists, trainees, a literacy and numeracy tutor, two youth workers, and additional staff. Although arts-based in its delivery method, the approach was aligned with an alternative learning provision approach with the goal of improved literacy and numeracy.

Strong recruitment channels were reported in early iterations of START, including a service level agreement with the local Connexion service. Relationships with the Youth Offending Team, Leaving Care Team, and Social Services were in place, in addition to local schools who identified Year 11 leavers with no planned pathway. Projects were also supported in partnerships with other local services, including the Children's Services, Job Centre Plus, H&F Volunteers Centre, and Education Business Partnership. Young Lyric undertook an initial assessment of learners to create individual learning plans aimed at improving life chances of beneficiaries. On completion of START, education and training pathways were formed for those who were ready to move to Level 2 learning. For those not wanting to return to education, Lyric arranged apprenticeship, or employment opportunities to develop 'motivation, confidence, personal effectiveness and basic skills' (p. 3).

In 2008, Lyric secured multi-year funding from Shine, which was renewed through 2014. During this time, the minimum age of participants moved from 13 to 16. Provision for younger participants was considered through the development of Young Lyric's REWIND programme, for 11-13 year olds. Interestingly, there was no provision for at-risk or NEET young people aged 14-15 made available

from 2013 onwards. The description of START changes during this time, suggesting START 'utilises the creative arts to re-engage young people with the learning process and attempts to 're-ignite' within them a stronger sense of possibility and aspiration' (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2013, p. 1). Literacy and numeracy are no longer highlighted, yet participants were still required to work towards qualifications, although now it was City & Guilds Literacy Qualification and an Arts Award Bronze Level. The content of programming also changed, suggesting use of the creative arts, including music tracks developed by participants, and a stronger focus on devising theatre, with the creation of monologues based on participants' aspirations. Still running over 6 weeks, it was shortened to four days a week from 12-6pm. Participants were given post-project support through advice, guidance, and follow-up conversations at three-month intervals, although the sustained relationships and external employment opportunities of the initial START programming no longer appear. There was evidence of internal employment successes, with two participants in the 2011/12 programme successfully securing roles with Lyric's front of house team, yet the strong figures of pathways reported in earlier years were not present. Across all reporting, it is not made evident why alterations to the programme were made. This could be that changes were agreed upon in verbal discussions with funders or changes did not seem relevant to comment upon. It is also unclear if changes were the result of consultation with participants.

By 2015, the programme extended its relationship with external providers to aid in employment skills readiness, such as preparing a CV, interview techniques, and communication. Pathways were strengthened through external providers as well, including work experience placements at cultural sector employers, including the BBC. Peer mentors were allocated to participants to address their personal and social growth, and pastoral needs. Connexions Service also provided personal advisors to support the young people. The varied use of artforms was still present, with BBC mentors working with young people to make their own films. In START's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year (2016), strengthened pathways returned with six (of an estimated 25) finding work internally with Lyric's front of house Team. Reporting for 2017/18 suggests 80% of START participants re-engaged with employment, education, or training for at least two years after attending, although the quality and correlation of pathway in connection to Lyric is unknown (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2018a, p. 6).<sup>17</sup> There is no record of literacy and numeracy qualifications being gained by participants from 2016/17 onwards, yet the use of a 'literacy assessment' features in proposals and reports as an indicator of participant development during the project. It appears participants were required to take a pre- and post-

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<sup>17</sup> In Chapter 8, I interrogate statistics of re-engagement, questions the method used to collect data and framework to assess causation between participation and employment.

literacy test, yet without any tuition or focus on literacy within programming itself. Participants continued to complete Arts Award qualifications. Throughout the reports made available, there is cursory mention of the intrinsic value of working through an arts-based process.

In 2019/20, reporting notes the age of participants at 16-21 (previously 16-19) and there is a shift towards development of artistic and soft skill development, rather than employability skills. As earlier, there is little explanation in reporting why these changes occurred, or who was consulted in making these changes. What is highlighted in reporting is changing needs of participants, with young people needing further mental and emotional support during the programme. Behavioural, mental, and emotional needs are discussed in previous reports, yet the focus was more on friction between participants and working with young people who had experience with the criminal justice system. The recruitment and retention of participants also decreases from 2017 onwards, from 10-12 on a project, to just five young people completing the autumn 2019 project, and then just seven enrolled on the project in February 2020, which needed to cease due to Covid-19. Additionally, the mentoring of participants appears to have changed from mentors with experience with young people, to Lyric staff and volunteers as part of a corporate social responsibility programme with no reporting provided on the effectiveness of these sessions. Successful pathways towards employment also are in decline, with only two successful in-house employment progressions reported from 2019 onward, and no full-time employment externally.

START continued to evolve across 2019 and 2020, testing out new delivery teams, increasing participant age again to 16-25, and moving focus towards the development of creative skills. The connection to developing employability skills and in-depth work to encourage participants to plan pathways for themselves ceased. It is interesting that at a time when there has been significant investment across the UK in developing skills for work and supporting the well-being of young people through engagement programmes, Young Lyric has moved its focus towards creative skill development, which incidentally features infrequently in participant feedback discussed in subsequent chapters. Reporting during this time also begins to point to issues with recruitment channels, wherein in previous years, reporting suggested strong relationships with referral partners, including social workers, jobs centres, youth offending teams, and other support workers. The decline in referrals had an impact on the number of young people taking part. Additionally, the referrers putting young people forward often did not know much about the programme and, therefore, it was being described to young people slightly differently than Lyric might describe it. This led to some young people not arriving at START with a desire to perform or engage in dramatic

activities, but rather with a focus on a dedicated activity working towards employment, education, or training. The programme, although using the same name of START, is a very different initiative than was set out in 2005, for 13-19 year old NEET young people to engage in the arts, and gain qualifications in literacy and numeracy. In 2022, START was described using the following copy:

START is a six-week programme working with 10-12 young people not in education, employment or training and is an integral part of Lyric's inclusion work, engaging West Londoners aged 16-25. We use drama to identify and address underlying causes of participants' disengagement. It acts as a catalyst for young people to create their own fulfilling and creative futures by examining their behaviours. By unlocking potential, inspiring creativity and ambition in connection to the work on our stages we engage, nurture and challenge participants through an artistic process, underpinned by respect, knowledge, growth and reflection. START uses drama-based activities and explores prevalent themes with participants in a safe and supported environment. For many this will be the first time they have been willing to engage with learning and self-reflection.

The description of START reflects the changes in focus from literacy skill development and work readiness to that of creative and soft skill development.

This chapter provided the foundation of a critical case study on Lyric's participatory arts programming, situating Young Lyric's historic and current work within the wider landscape of arts and education provision. The contextualisation of START, provided here, highlights the varied evaluative measures undertaken from intensive tracking of literacy levels, undertaken by the START team, as a measure of success, to observation, and analysis of pathway success. This informed the approach taken in field research developed in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 6: Building a living knowledge base of engagement through observation

This chapter interrogates experience and impact of Lyric's START programme, with and for underrepresented young people;<sup>18</sup> utilising observations, researcher reflections, discussions, and engagement with participants, Lyric staff and freelance practitioners, and others connected to Lyric Hammersmith's programmes. I have intentionally placed data collected from participant interviews in a separate chapter to allow participants' voices to resonate fully. Throughout Chapters 6 and 7, I assert that experience is personal and must account for self-schema if there is a desire to truly understand impact and learn from participants. This chapter begins by addressing the need for plurality of voice if deeper understanding of impact of START is to be found. I then present analysis of the varied stakeholders attached to the programme before presenting my active research process; utilising ethnographic observations, group reflective workshops, and use of reflexive research practice.

The research conducted, from October 2018-March 2022, commenced with a review of existing data held by Lyric as described in previous chapters. This was followed by discussions with key staff involved in the delivery of programming with underrepresented young people. In February 2019, following ethical approval from LSBU, I began my observations at Lyric in earnest, taking in organisational observations, from those across the Young Lyric programmes, to specifically in-depth observations of the START programme. These observations were complemented by informal discussions with the START team and plenary sessions with participants. In April 2019, I held my first round of post-project, semi-structured participant interviews and an evaluation workshop utilising creative methods. As START runs just three times a year, the time between projects allowed for reflexive practice and refining of interview questions.

The multi-layered research process initially included follow-up interviews with START participants every six months based on my reading of previous evaluative reporting, feedback from staff members, as well as two interviews with previous participants who continued to engage with Lyric in various capacities. The evaluation reports and anecdotal evidence reviewed suggested that participant pathways encouraged in-house employment opportunities including ushering, box office duties, bar work, assistant workshop facilitators, and training as part of Young Lyric's Alumni programme. The Alumni programme provided basic safeguarding, health and safety training, workshop facilitation skill development, and offered a selected group of young people paid project-

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<sup>18</sup> This use of 'with' and not 'for' is intentional, as programming responds to the needs and interests of participants.

based employment with ongoing support from the Young Lyric team. I surmised that as participants would be returning to Lyric for employment, training, and other theatre-based projects, follow-up interviews could be easily arranged when they were in the building. Moreover, as the young people continued to engage with Lyric regularly, discussions about mid and longer-term change would be flowing as they would be able to connect the experience on START to new opportunities at Lyric and beyond. Whilst reporting suggests these opportunities were made available before early 2019, my observations and collated data from 2019 onward did not fully support this outlook as elaborated in the below discussions.

### Plurality of voice

In this chapter, I extend the discussion of the need for plurality both in methodological approach and of 'cultural voice' to address and represent impact of participatory arts engagement to its fullest. The cultural voice I refer to originates from Freire's call for 'naming the world', where people articulate the personal, define their world and place themselves within it, with an aim to create a shared sense of the world. Freire argues this shared sense of the world comes from dialogue which 'cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming-between those who deny other men the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them' (1972, p. 76). As developed in my methodology (Chapter 3), I draw on Moufee's (2013) discussions of pluralism, acknowledging the numerous perspectives and values at play. It is this desire to allow the naming of perspectives and multiple truths that underpins this research of Lyric's START programme: to investigate how participants can inform and name their own outcomes within their understanding of their own lives, complemented by Lyric's understanding and learning, to demonstrate wider impacts of the work. Rather than placing participant and organisational understandings as binary or hierarchical, I seek to acknowledge the power struggles at play and explore the rich and meaningful findings from a multitude of perspectives.

### *Naming the people ~ Stakeholders*

To achieve plurality of voice in connection to START, it is necessary to consider the stakeholders' involvement. The term stakeholder is often used, in a collective sense, to name those involved or impacted by a particular project, service, or initiative. Derived from the business sector, many definitions focus on the connection between people from a strategic perspective, such as Freeman's definition: 'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives' (1984, p. 46). Skilton and Purdy, addressing corporate social responsibility,



define stakeholders as involving organisations, individuals, and constituencies; and how each is either an influencer or being influenced by action (2017, p. 103). ACE's *Stakeholder Focus Research* report defines stakeholders as 'everyone who has an interest in or is affected by the Arts Council's work. This is used on occasion as a collective term for respondents ..., including members of the public' (2014, p. 11). Such definitions have worked their way into the creative and cultural sector, with each stakeholder making sense of the world differently. I use *stakeholders* in a similar fashion to ACE, as an umbrella term to describe the varied groupings of people who are both included and impacted by this research. I do not like it as a term, as it feels too corporate for my liking, but was unable to settle on alternative terminology that clarified the collective meaning I wished to convey. The below figure 3 illustrates the many stakeholders attached to START.

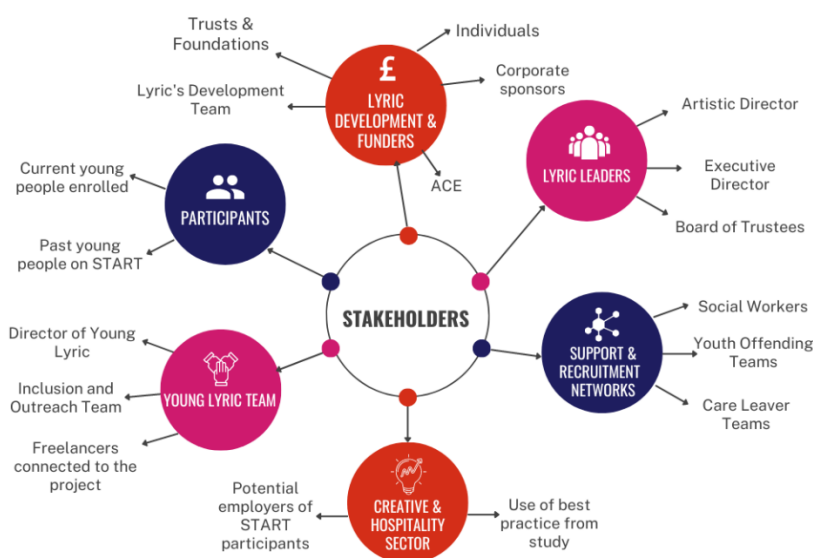


Figure 3

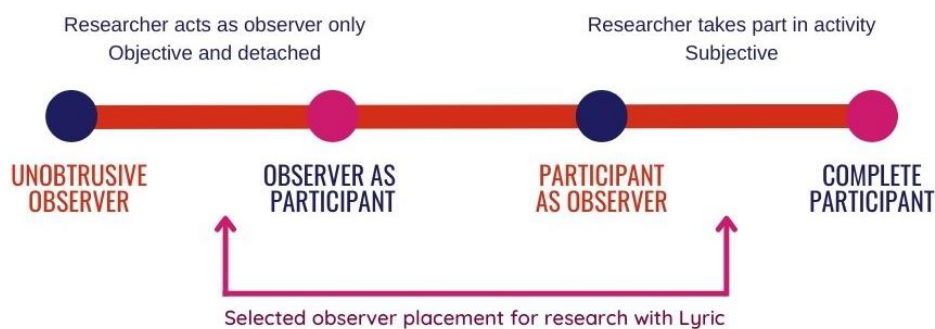
As illustrated in the above figure, there are numerous stakeholders surrounding the programme, each with their own expectations and agendas, which do not always align, lending itself to the need for 'conflictual consensus', as described by Moufee. Addressing the hierarchy of expectations is also of importance, taking into consideration how success is measured by varied stakeholders and what stakeholders' visions of success are most desired.

### Ethnographic observation

I employed ethnographic observation as a way of viewing and understanding stakeholder engagement surrounding START, with a focus on the participants. I was present at Lyric for approximately 130 days over the research period. Some of these days were more eventful than

others, with copious observation notes, whereas other days held minimal noteworthy observations. Still, all days worked towards building my understanding of how Lyric functioned as an organisation and approached work with young people. It is important to restate that this research process was hindered by the closure of the theatre from March 2020-May 2021. During this time observations directly related to work with young people were effectively on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on returning to the theatre. I attended circa 25 days of online Lyric staff meetings, Young Lyric team meetings, training sessions and other strategic meetings, and virtual projects with young people.

Observation by its very nature seeks to obtain a more in-depth understanding of social settings and the lives of people within the given setting. The role I adopted was guided by the willingness of the participants to engage with the research and my understanding and involvement within the existing world. Gorman et al. (2005) consider four researcher perspectives common in observation: the unobtrusive observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant. Using Gorman et al. and Junker's approaches to the observation continuum as foundation, the following figure 4 demonstrates the movement I undertook as an observer at Lyric.



Derived from images by Gorman et al (2005, p. 106) and Junker (1960, p. 36)

Figure 4

Within the observation continuum, I moved between the observer-as-participant and towards complete participant. Although never venturing towards unobtrusive observer, where observation takes place more covertly, I did find some of the most helpful observing occurred in team meetings and sitting in the office, surrounded by the buzz of discussions. In other moments, I acted as an observer-as-participant, where there is limited interaction with participants unless seeking to verify and clarify observations (Gorman et al., 2005, p. 106). I spent most of my time as a participant-as-observer, interacting with participants more fully, taking part in activities to achieve a connection that would not be possible in an observer-as-participant role. Gorman et al. describes the participant-as-observer's role as 'becoming involved as a participant in the lives of the subjects, advising, assisting, and otherwise intervening in day-to-day events' over a length of time (p. 106).

They suggest that, in a participant-as-observer role, the researcher may be employed by the organisation, perhaps in a temporary capacity, working with participants in day-to-day activities (p. 106). Lastly, on the furthest end of the spectrum is the participant, who sees the researcher fully immersed as an active member within the world. This brings with it ethical dilemmas, as it is difficult for a participant to view the researcher as other than a participant (p. 107). Outside this observation continuum, there are further roles an observer can take: such as that of the facilitator, acting as participant working towards change from within; or that of narrator, describing what has happened from a position of authority.

Held close to my research process was Gorman et al.'s warning on observation; 'The more you function as a member of the everyday world of the researched, the more you risk losing the eye of the uninvolved outsider; yet the more you participate, the greater the opportunity to learn' (p. 106). This was evident as I took on different roles within Lyric. The observations gathered early in my research held more distance: factual, featuring the setting, engagement with activities, and general relationships formed between participants and the START team. There was a hesitancy in thick description and utilising criticality and reflexivity in my writing as I tried to find my role as researcher. I struggled with finding balance between praising of accomplishment and addressing the negative aspects surrounding the research. As the research progressed, I was able to make connections between observations, participant behaviours, and Lyric's communications surrounding START, leading to deeper criticality as I understood delivery models, and was more confident in questioning systems and perceptions of impact.

In the initial START observations, I found my place quickly, thanks to the lead and assistant theatre practitioners who welcomed me into the space, allowing me to participate in theatre games, discussions, and feedback sessions, and to sit in small group work. These observations read differently to those of other projects, where my presence was not met with such enthusiasm. I used a simple form following visits to START to log observations. For each observation I set myself the following questions as standard:

- Who is present? (number of participants, gender ratio, staff, guests)
- Where is the session taking place and at what time?
- What is the main activity undertaken?
- What is the general mood/feeling in the room?
- How is the session being delivered? (continual input from practitioner, short description of activity and guidance, participant-led, etc.)
- How do participants respond to the direction?
- What is the communication and teamwork like between participants and staff?

What feedback is given? (are participants praised, giving constructive feedback to each other, being inclusive)

Are there any specific issues to flag?

Are there any moments that demonstrate growth of the group or individuals?

For example, below is an extract from my observation log from a visit to a START project:

**Observation: 14 March 2019**

**Setting:** The room is stuffy with little natural light. The room (Creative Space) is shared with other classes so there are pieces of equipment including timpani and a keyboard. The keyboard currently is off and has a mug of tea sitting on it. The room also has a digital whiteboard, but from conversation with the team, it doesn't appear that it is ever used in sessions.

The room is untidy with papers in piles, cords from different electronics lay around, some old stage curtains in the corner. I don't believe the paperwork is all from START and must have been left from other classes. On the wall is the Code of Conduct the participants created on Day 1 and some brainstorming on behaviour management (e.g., take time out of the room, a quick chat, support to leave for the day). There are chairs and two tables in the space. The chairs are in various stages of disrepair. Some at the point that you can't sit in them and others that you can, but tilt you forward and are uncomfortable.

There are a few issues with personal hygiene in this group and the room has a strong smell of body odour and unwashed clothes to it. The START team brought in deodorant that is sitting on the table for participants to use.

**Participants:** 7 participants are present. They range in age from 17-22. Some are still wearing coats that are fully zipped up.

**Theatre Practitioners:** The START directors (a lead and assistant director) were very open to me coming into the space as with my last visit. They provided me with a quick overview of what they have accomplished since I last visited and explained the session plan for the afternoon. Both appear confident in their roles and demonstrate an awareness of the different dynamics within the participant group. Both present a caring and approachable attitude and work well with each other.

**Activity:** This was the 8<sup>th</sup> full day. The energy in the room was subdued as it was after lunch. The afternoon session was about creating scenes using stimuli explored in a previous session. A group of three females devised a scene about being doctors. Although not explicit in the scene, in conversation they noted doctors were of a high status and therefore aspirational. The scene explored gender bias and equal pay. They developed some interesting ideas but the characters they created were not well formed. This led to a struggle in scripting the scene as they found it difficult to find the 'correct' words as they wanted to appear like doctors and not themselves. A pair of male participants created a 3-part montage exploring what it means to 'be a man'. Devji described this as what he feels is expected of him at home and how he is not able to meet this demand placed on him by his father. The third group of three developed a debate-styled piece exploring race and the media. Elijah acted as 'devil's advocate'. During the 60-minute work time Groups 1 and 3 worked on their feet, listening to each other's ideas, for the most part, and testing

them out. They appeared invested in the ideas. The START directors moved between the groups providing encouragement and suggestions, staying with them long enough to move the piece along or solve arguments. Group 2 was predominately led by Devji. Participant John vacillated between postures of indifference and attempting to take over the leadership of the scene. The scenes were presented to the group and participants fed back on what they had observed. Participants' comments varied from focus on the 'character' created, to critique of the way in which it was performed. The START team helped facilitate the conversation. I was asked for my feedback on the scenes which was a helpful way for me to provide encouragement from an outside perspective.

I also moved around the room during the working time to listen in on scene progression, providing encouragement and suggestions when asked. This was done with the START team's approval. Participants were using their communication and teamwork skills well although there were dips in motivation due to the prolonged working time. Tanya often has trouble staying focused but did well today. As noted above, John needs continual check-in to keep him on task. He can become agitated quickly.

The above observations were typical of a START session, demonstrating relatively well-prepared sessions that were executed by the START team. There was a good balance of individual, small group and full ensemble work and positive placement of communication skills. As the workshops continued and relationships formed between participants and the START team some aspects became easier and others harder. The group had learnt how to work together, understanding best ways of communicating with each other and to get the best out of each other. This of course meant they also knew how to annoy and provoke each other. Overall, the session plans created by the START director and assistant director in the first four weeks were well organised with a good arc to help develop participants' creative and social skills aiding in their developing confidence within the group. The sessions that were devoted to gaining an Arts Award level 1 qualification, mentoring, employment skills and pathway planning were delivered by the Young Lyric team (full-time staff members). My observation of these sessions noted a more rushed quality with a feeling of being layered on top of the project. Participants' attitudes changed during these sessions that took on a more 'school-like' approach. The artistic team (director and assistant director) did not stay for these sessions, using the time to plan. This changed the dynamic in the space and my observation was that it signalled to the participants that 'this' was not important. Indeed, the qualification sessions and mentoring lacked the care and attention in developing the young people as individuals, the antithesis of what was being described in funding proposals as a key mechanism for change. This continued throughout my observations of other START projects, and I questioned the usefulness of these sessions for the participants.

When reaching the final two weeks of the project, across the five projects I observed, the atmosphere also changed as the process moved more into the rehearsal phase. This is to be expected as ideas and movement needs to take on a more finalised feel, rather than being organic. With the exception of one rehearsal process that I witnessed, the START team's drive for artistic excellence and a polished performance overshadowed the key skills developed in the process period. Whereas taking time to discuss individual perspectives and readings of situations, seeking conflictual consensus on making change to a given scene and other common practices explored in the rehearsal room were put to the side once in the rehearsal process. Most director and assistant director teams explained to the participants that moving into the rehearsal phase would bring with it changes to how the sessions ran, yet having never gone through such a process, it was difficult for many of them. Post-project interviews with participants located these sessions as where feelings of agency shifted and ownership of what was created dampened. This was project dependent, with some experiences being more open than others. In the project described above, the last two weeks saw developed relationships begin to break down between participants themselves and between participants and the START team. More arguments took place as the roles changed from collaborators to a more director/participant (teacher/student) relationship, participants were removed from sessions more often, and there was general disregard for the rules that they as a company had set up. I observed a change in the delivery of sessions, captured in the below observation a week before the end of the project, where the aims of sessions began to lose focus and the intent was not fully clear.

**Observation: 27 March 2019**

**Activity:** The session was supposed to be devoted to Arts Award as the project is soon ending. The START team was running behind. When I arrived the group was finishing up poems and spoken word that they had written. The stimulus was to write about something they felt strongly about and that they did not usually share. There was no push to share if they did not want to. Of the six present, four shared their work. Tina had a poem about losing a loved one. She suggested she felt it was good work and was pleased to have shared it with the group. Fasia shared her work, which demonstrates growth in confidence as it was the first time she actively wanted to share. Her poem touched upon losing a friend/mentor to suicide. John shared a short 4-line piece about being depressed and ended by saying he was sorry, but this is the way he feels. This is progress as he normally does not put pen to paper. He was celebrated for sharing with the group in the correct contexts. He then continued to write during the next activity because of this validation but stopped when he asked if it would be published and was told it wouldn't be. Devji wrote a piece on race that was inspired by political speeches they looked at in the morning. Elijah wouldn't share as he said he didn't like being told when and where to be creative. The START team acknowledged the concentration and care they took in writing their poems. It was not clear why participants had been asked to write poems and if these would be used in their final sharing to an audience.

In reflecting on the delivery and structure of the sessions, as they were running late, there was a rushed sense to the sharing of their work. Given the heaviness of what participants were sharing, their desire to share, and need to be validated for doing so, there needed to be more time to allow ideas to resonate and for participants to sit with their ideas. I questioned if there was more that could be done from the START team to facilitate meaningful conversations following such open sharing. Creation of poems based on personal experience and sharing within a safe place begins to address Freire's notion of 'naming the world'. My observations of this session left me confused as the gentle and encouraging dialogue of earlier weeks had seemingly been replaced with content generation activities to either bulk out the final sharing or were used as a filler activity. Additionally, although those that presented their work were congratulated, the value of writing, sharing and discussing ideas, even if there is no external gain was not developed. The Young Lyric team and complementing reports suggest that START aims to encourage participants to examine their own behaviours and consider their futures, suggesting the continued mindful discussions and strong pedagogical practice needs to be in place throughout. I questioned how a more reflective and reflexive practice could be brought into the sessions to assist participants in considering not only what they have achieved but how and why that change has happened. I used thick description to provide further depth to observations, providing context for situation and considering further questions.

#### *Use of thick description*

Anthropologist, Geertz is most often associated with the use of "thick description"<sup>19</sup>. Geertz drew on philosopher Ryle's (1971) concept of thick description to discuss intentionality of observed behaviour. Thick description provides a reader with not only a description of the observation but situational context, who is taking part, relational and interactional discussion, and any historical knowledge needed to clarify how a researcher's interpretations have been made (Denzin, 1989). Denzin furthered the use of thick description suggesting it:

... does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It established the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meaning of interacting individuals are heard.  
(Denzin, 1989, p. 83)

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<sup>19</sup> Geertz used double quotations around the term, which I have chosen to not continue herewith.

I applied thick description to observations where further analysis, due to the complexity of situation, was needed. An example of thick description and reflective notes in relation to the observation of 12 March 2019, described earlier in this chapter.

#### **Thick description and reflective notes**

**Setting:** The use of Creative Space as a room for START makes sense on some levels as it is away from the rest of the theatre/offices and near the front door. This means participants can come and go freely without interrupting others or feeling anxious about walking through crowds attending the theatre. On the other hand, it means they are isolated from others and not really a part of Lyric when they are attending. In fact, on Day 8 they have not seen the theatre or many other spaces at Lyric. Why is this project held at Lyric if it is not making use of the resources available?

The room is dirty, and this appears to have been the way it has been for some time. How does this affect the group? It is not an inspiring or creative space; it is an unloved rehearsal/classroom. It is much different from the other rooms in the Rueben Foundation Wing that are new and shiny with nice chairs and better equipment. I wonder if participants have noticed this- that they are kept away from others in the most unloved space? I suppose as they haven't been shown around the building, they don't know what they are missing!

**Participants:** I noted the wearing of coats, as in winter coats in my observation. It is not cold in the room. Are they wearing coats because they are cold or is it connected to a deeper need to perhaps close themselves away from others, or is it for another reason? There is an interesting divide on attire within the room: two in particular are always in branded and new clothing. Clothing seems to provide a status for them, and image appears very important. There was a discussion this morning about trainers and the 'need' to get a new pair for an outfit. On the other side of the spectrum, there is a participant who is holding his shoe together with black gaffer tape. Whilst one may say it is only clothing, it runs deeper, for some it is connected to how they wish to present themselves to the world and is interwoven with a sense of self; whereas for others, clothing is a luxury and the poverty in which they live defines how they can present themselves to the world. This symbolic showing of access to money, was often discussed amongst participants. Three of the participants are currently living in hostels/assisted living facilities: one in a sheltered place for young women, one in a hostel, and another seems to move between hostel and family members' homes. Lyric is covering travel costs by topping up Oyster cards and giving them lunch. It feels that for some of them an afternoon snack or option to take something away with them might be helpful. The project aims to help participants to think about future planning and moving towards education, employment, or training. When thinking about where their next meal may come from, this surely takes away the ability to really consider options. It feels that there are a few missing pieces to the programme and development of young people's individual goals.

Personal hygiene is a continual problem with some members of the group, and it has caused issue as participants choose to work away from some because of the odour. It is unclear if the START team talks with participants about this- the reasons for and effects of body odour are nuanced but also carry with them limitations. Mental health issues are prevalent in this group and the START



team are continually checking in with participants to ensure they are able to stay in the space. The needs are complex, and it appears that staff do not have a full understanding of participants' needs and backgrounds. One START Team Member seems to hold this information but may not pass it on to the team. Participants appear more at ease today and have engaged in small talk during the break. John is in a better place today mentally, although still presenting challenging behaviour. There is a drug and alcohol problem in addition to the ill mental health. Today seemed to be a better day although he vacillated in mood. Devji seems to just get on with it and work around him, but it feels something needs to be done as John's behaviour causes problems with other participants. This is 2 weeks into a 6-week course, and it is unclear if he really wants to be here. I do wonder if keeping him on the course is what is best for the wider group as he can be unpredictable and his refusal to take part in activities has an impact on the group. On the other side- it is good for him to commit to a routine and show up daily and engage in activity. Assisting John in securing a positive pathways post-project though will need careful planning and resource.

Is Lyric concerned about funding and number of participants? Is this reason to keep young people on a course when negatively impacting a wider group? What could be put in place to aid John's personal growth and completion of the course whilst also seeing to the needs of the wider group? A further question to consider- numbers are supposed to be 10-12 young people, this course has 7. What do the funders think of this?

**Theatre Practitioners/Pastoral staff:** Both the director and assistant director have worked on START previously and this is evident in their approach. They have a structure in place but are allowing the young people to guide specific areas of enquiry. A Young Lyric Team member checks in with the director and assistant director very briefly each day, and with participants on occasion through Arts Award sessions and other check-ins. The sessions are difficult, is there any protocol in place for practitioners dealing with distressing information or behaviour during the day? The team has a debrief but this tends to focus on participants, not on personal well-being. [START Team Member] is really good with the participants when in the space, ensuring that they understand what is happening and able to continue, although they seem to disappear from the workshop space for long periods of time (20+ minutes). I question why this is and what would happen if an incident occurred during the time they are gone.

**Activity:** I enjoyed watching the groups work together and could see some clear progression in their communication skills since my last visit. They were listening to each other more and appeared to have found ways of dealing with 'leadership' in the group. There were moments of tension that appeared. I spent a few minutes listening in and offering encouragement with the female group: Tina has little awareness of when her time to speak has ended and this causes issue. Fasia retreats from conversation when it gets too heated. Tanya also removes herself or finds others to talk to. She is very impressionable and more attention to her behaviours with others is needed. The stimulus was to create a scene based on a moment where people needed to stand up for what was right, which manifested itself into these three very big issues: Racism, Sexism/Gender Equality, and Toxic Masculinity/Homophobia. In my personal opinion- these issues were too big and that is what causes participants to get worked up in their groups. You cannot tackle Gender Equality in a two-minute scene. How could this have been better executed to empower participants? Was there a need to move so far away from personal experience in group

1, to a point where they had no frame of reference and found themselves frustrated because they couldn't move the argument forward? Exploring racism and the media proved a good topic for debate and two of the participants really got into this discussion. From an observational point of view, the one white participant needed further support within the conversation and creation of character that was not stereotypical.

Additionally, Devji has recently come out to his parents and in his words, his father is 'not taking this well.' He is seeking validation of self from the group and exploring his feelings through scene work. This borders on drama therapy, which the programme is not, nor are the theatre practitioners equipped in this area. Defining the roles and remit of the project seems necessary to ensure everyone's safety. I also question the creation of scenes in this manner- how will they be used moving forward? Do they work under an umbrella concept? What did participants gain from the experience?

My observations, reflective notes, and review of discussions with participants using thick description saw me continually querying the boundaries between participation in the creation of a piece of drama and drama therapy. On reflection, the thick description does not go far enough in some instances, such as my observation of issues with hygiene and body odour, which is connected to a lack of resource and access. Whilst deodorant was made available, this does not address the deep-seated issues that young people living in precarious housing face: less access to washing machines, cost of washing and detergent, additional clothes to wear, etc. The pedagogical underpinnings of the programme remained elusive, with each START director bringing with them their own way of working. The employment of freelance directors who are highly skilled in working with marginalised groups is commonplace within delivery of participatory arts programmes, and it is to be expected that they utilised their own skill sets and past practices to develop the piece with the participants. This in itself was not an issue. The issue lies in the vacillating quality of the START content, delivery methods, performances, participants' sense of achievement and enjoyment in taking part, and developed pathways from START; all inextricably linked to the experience the participants had with the START team. There needs to be clearer expectations of the mechanisms by which START, and other participatory arts outputs are developed. I do not suggest there needs to be strict rules in place for practitioners to follow, as this would suppress the creativity of the practitioner as artist and that of the participants, yet guidance on best practice and carving out space for agency and ownership of content creation would enhance the programme.

Whilst it is not possible to provide full analysis of every interaction and observation within this thesis, I have attempted to include examples that demonstrate the complexity of START and defining impact connected to participation. Through thick description, the socio-political frictions, cultural differences, relational and power struggles between participants and staff, could be unpacked and

experience connected to impact. The process I engaged in through thick description and reflection, as well as the provocations considered, provided a platform for me to engage with the Young Lyric team differently. Through ongoing discussions, I was able to put forward these observations and recommendations for the team to consider in a reflexive manner, which I develop further in this thesis. Use of thick description also proved useful as Lyric would often view situations and evidence differently than I would. Indeed, even within Lyric as a collaborative partner, departments viewed individual stories and evidence from their own subjective lens, reminding me of Freire's assertion that dialogue 'cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming' (1972, p. 76). I do not believe it was an active attempt to dampen the voice of the participants in Lyric's case, more of a desire to achieve in the eyes of the funder, therefore framing impact from organisational understanding. Over the research period, there were instances where 'powerful impact' was suggested by Lyric, which did not always read as holding the same impact to me as a researcher, nor did participant feedback validate these claims. These tensions between differing views and values encouraged the need to consider agonistic pluralism, allowing for differing voices to be heard through consulting varied stakeholders to develop a holistic understanding of a given idea. For example: following the Summer 2021 START programme, I analysed the attendance data for participants at 94.5%. This was the first project back following extended closure of the theatre for Covid-19. This was much higher attendance than in previous cohorts where attendance sat around 82%-86%<sup>20</sup>. Lyric's development team perceived the increased overall attendance of participants as an indicator of enhanced engagement with Lyric and an uplift in participants' resilience; whereas the Young Lyric team considered this increase to be connected to fewer available external opportunities due to Covid-19 restrictions and the programme being a welcomed distraction. Both are valid explanations and are example of how data can be used to demonstrate such ideas from an organisational perspective and the lens of the given stakeholder. Through my discussions with the young people, I found that they connected attendance to the friendships formed and a desire to 'not let the group down'. From an organisational perspective, Lyric suggests that they provided the opportunity of START and the facilitation of the sessions, thus allowing the relationships to form and, therefore, the uplift in attendance. Whilst this is true, I suggest that placing ownership of attendance with the participants demonstrates their own growth as young people, taking responsibility for their own and collective actions. When considering the young people had come out of a year of lockdown, wherein many were not in education, employment, or

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<sup>20</sup> Lyric attributes attendance to those that take part and complete the programme, therefore excluding any participant who left the programme at any point in the six-weeks. If the figure accounted for the two young people who left the programme in summer 2020 (one in week 1 and the other in week 4) the statistic of attendance would sit at 83%.

training, they needed an opportunity to engage with people their own age and this was provided by Lyric. Nevertheless, the cohort created the friendships. Coming out of months of having to isolate, this was welcomed by the young people and an achievement that needed to be acknowledged.

### *Organisational ethnography*

Following review of my first round of START observations in February/March 2019, I found I was lacking in data exploring Lyric's continued relationships with the young people, development of pathways, and feelings of achievement in receiving an Arts Award. I considered experiences of the participants as essential, and this remained the leading voice in my research. Also, of importance was developing a wider picture of how Lyric cultivated and maintained relationships with participants; how Lyric digested and reflected on the programme after each project; and how they perceived, discussed, and disseminated data on impact. As developed above, Lyric's reading of situations and perceptions of change often differed from my own, and therefore I suspected from participants. It was also unclear how Young Lyric's programming interacted, complemented, and learned from other departments.

Over the research period, I noted tensions between Young Lyric staff and other departments, or rather between the culture of participatory work with young people and the culture of Lyric as a producing theatre and business. Common tensions surrounded space, both in room bookings and the setup of spaces. Young Lyric projects were on occasion moved out of their usual spaces to accommodate corporate bookings, disrupting the structure of workshops. Other times, it was the Young Lyric team not tidying the space or setting it up properly for the next group. Tensions also arose due to behaviours of participants within the building. As START participants attend Lyric for the full day, they are provided a lunch, often catered by the Lyric Bar and Grill. Once finished with their meal they have 20-30 minutes of free time. Some choose to leave the building, whilst others stay in the common areas. On occasion, undesirable behaviours were noted by the wider staff, including participants being too loud, swearing, playing music on their phones, leaving rubbish around, moving chairs, or responding to staff in a rude manner. Sometimes this was dealt with well, and other times it was not, causing friction among staff. The Young Lyric team holds skills and experience in working with participants and has developed ways of approaching issues/discussions on behaviours from a learning perspective with marginalised young people. Protocols were put in place to aid in creating more desirable behaviours in the building through discussions and ensuring a member of the team was present in main areas during lunch breaks to manage behaviours. This was successful to some extent, yet was noticed by participants who questioned how welcome they were

within the public spaces. Indeed, such requests of marginalised young people are problematic when working through a socially engaged activity, wherein they are welcomed in a space, until they are unable to conform to the hegemon. This is in part due to the cultural shift within Lyric: the previous vision of Lyric saw a dual commitment to young people and the business of theatre; whereas the current mission foregrounds artistic excellence, and engagement with young people is situated within a creative lens. This shift places programmes that work with marginalised participants in difficult positions at times, as the needs of participants are heightened and, with this, comes behaviours that can be testing. Further dialogue between departments and commitment to reporting incidents or concerns in a collegiate manner would strengthen feelings of belonging within the space for the participants.

Entanglements between historical delivery of START, provision for participants and pathways, and current practices held additional frictions amongst some staff. Long-standing freelance and in-house START team members had their own views on young people's engagement and the mission, aims and objectives of Lyric, which were not always aligned with others' understanding of underpinning mission and strategy. Some saw the building as a hub for young people to grow their skills and a safe place where they could seek advice and meet with friends, coming in for a chat or just to hang out for a bit, echoing the 2008-2017 way of working. As the vision, mission, and strategy changed to reflect new ideas and changing priorities, so did the way in which the building functioned. Across the research period, I observed continued struggles to fully embrace new ways of working from some staff and a continued desire from some, out of a sense of security and ease in previous ways of working, to revert back to 'old patterns'. My observations were of this continued struggle to provide individual support encompassing well-being, personal and social growth, assistance in developing employment or education pathways, and that of the newer vision of creating a space for young people to enhance their artistic growth through theatre.

My organisational observations extended beyond transactional accounts, sometimes focused towards understanding of how Young Lyric and its programmes functioned within the organisation and the wider creative and cultural landscape, and other times focused specifically on START and Lyric's retention of the programme. I often struggled to locate the indicators and suggested outcomes Lyric put forward for the programme through observations and interviews. I also questioned what *they*, as Lyric, understood to be happening during the six-week process, and how this trickled down into project delivery and subsequent experiences of participants.

### Reflective Journal Entry, 13 April 2019

Having had opportunity to reflect on the observations and interviews so far, I am slightly concerned about the responses I am getting from the participants in connection to the aims and intended outcomes I have read for START. Is it that I am not asking the right questions? Or is that the young people are not placing value on the same areas that Lyric suggests? I am not getting anything about the artistic process developing their skills (artistic/personal/social/etc.). I am hearing a lot about how being present at Lyric and the people they meet are important, plus being given the opportunity. How do I consider Lyric's suggested outcomes within this though as they want to see change in behaviour, improved literacy, enthusiasm towards getting a qualification and clear intention of returning to education, employment, or training? Or is this the issue, that I should be following the responses of participants rather than Lyric? Is it going back to participants and asking more direct questions to support Lyric's hypothesis? Or is it reframing things to look at Lyric as a whole? Maybe it goes deeper and what I see as tenuous and under supported aims and outcomes are not communicated to young people, so therefore the young people don't know what the outcomes of participation might be.

Over the coming months, I found the need to be present and observe Lyric as an organisation, in addition to the delivery model, to develop a more holistic understanding of impact. This led to a further need to interrogate wider framing of Lyric's work with young people; how the departments work with each other in connection to the work with young people; the shifting priorities and the desired overall messaging, connecting my earlier ideas of the hierarchical structure of stakeholders and plurality of voice.

Throughout my research, I took care in how I presented myself to participants and carefully considered how to explain my research in an open and honest way, whilst not overwhelming them with information. The concept of research and evaluation is off-putting to many people, bringing with it negative connections to assessment in school, of being watched or judged, and of needing to say or do the right thing. This can be heightened when working with marginalised young people, many of whom have had to go through numerous assessments during their lives, i.e., those in care, living in temporary accommodation, or suffering from ill mental health. I wanted to create open and honest dialogue that wasn't about me 'watching' them, 'catching them out', or attempting to gather the 'right' information; but to listen and understand their experiences and the connections they had made whilst taking part in START. I took considerable time and care in planning how I would work with participants yet had not fully considered that Lyric staff members might also feel 'watched' or a 'subject' in my study. I was mindful to listen carefully when at Lyric and approach conversations with openness. I therefore assumed others understood my positioning. During the fourth month of my time at Lyric, this assumption was challenged. Below is from my observation and reflexive notes:

Observation/activity	Reflective/reflexive notes
<p>Met with [two Lyric staff members] for separate meetings today. Notes logged as individual meetings. On arrival back in the office from meeting with [A], I sat down at the worktable. The office was fairly full today. I wrote up notes from meeting with [T] at the worktable.</p> <p>There is so much conversation happening in the office. It is hard to tune it out, but at the same time, it feels intrusive to listen in. I managed to strike a better balance today, I think. I wore my headphones to keep me focused but without playing anything through them.</p> <p>At the producing table [W] was talking to someone I didn't recognise, and that person then left. [W] turned to [T] and started talking about the conversation she had just had (I assume). [W] shouted out, "I hope Kristina doesn't include that in her research!" [T] laughed and asked me if I would be including that in my report. I laughed and said, "No, focusing on interviews with young people, not office conversations. No need to worry."</p>	<p>I know that [W] was joking really but it has me thinking about what they might think I am doing. Do they think I am listening in to all their conversations and taking notes? I really hope not as that would be uncomfortable for everyone. I don't want anyone feeling that they can't have fun and light conversations around me for fear of me using the information against them. I am not here as a spy.</p> <p>I have explained what my research is about and what I am planning. Maybe this isn't clear. I get introduced a lot when people are giving tours of the building as the PhD researcher. Where helpful, I always give a bit of information about what I am working on. Maybe I need to give a bit more info or engage in chats with Lyric staff outside the Young People's team. I think I have done well within my own team of explaining things. It may just be outside the team that there is confusion.</p> <p>[W] is leaving soon- perhaps she is feeling a bit freer with what she says in general. I really don't even know what she said though!</p>

This exchange highlighted the need to ensure my presence was not causing tension. This was coupled with a participant, early in the research process, asking me "Why do you ask so many questions?". This participant was not annoyed or upset by my questions; they were engaging me in conversation and trying to understand what I was doing. Although I had presented my research to the group and asked if they had questions, it was in getting to know me as a person that they felt comfortable asking more about it. As a result, I looked for ways to approach the research from a more caring and mindful perspective.

This broadening to include observations of Lyric more broadly ventures towards organisational ethnography. Organisational ethnography creates theoretical generalisations about 'how the world works' (Watson, 2009, p. 209). Gaggiotti et al. (2017) suggest organisational ethnography moves beyond being a method alone, towards defining sociological and organisational imagination. They define sociological imagination as '... enabling the individual to rise above her or his everyday social context, making it possible to acquire the distance necessary for critical reflection and change' and organisational imagination as 'reflexively focusing on the process of organising' (p. 325). This holistic way of approaching ethnography complemented my desire to situate findings from multiple vantages. I turn, later in the research process, to a more reflexive way of working with the team to

encourage critical reflection, but also movement towards organising and enacting change from within.

Whilst on arrival at Lyric in October 2018, it did not seem appropriate to observe and comment on organisational behaviour and systems. It wasn't what Lyric had asked for in the research brief and I had focused my initial proposal on the personal and social impacts of participation. Fourteen months later, in December 2019 the makeup of the Young Lyric team was very different, with the Director of Young Lyric and three Producers newly appointed. Organisational shifts in power had led to uncertainty amongst staff as they navigated new working relationships, and I, in turn, found myself in a unique position of being a 'knowledge holder' purely because I had historical knowledge, if only of a mere fourteen months. I used this opportunity to invest in discussions with Young Lyric staff, observe on the fringes, and investigate how staff and participants voiced ideas or desire for change and how this manifested into action or the lack thereof. This multimethod approach is seen as an advantage of organisational ethnographic research: the ability to gain better understanding of perspectives, actions, and behaviours, as opposed to analysing interview data which distils the 'vision' or what they expect I would like (Gobo et al., 2020). This also gave opportunity for me as researcher to be practical, making recommendations and action small changes to address issues. To help validate or negate some of my initial thoughts about the structure, delivery, and pathways of START, I observed other classes and workshops. As pathways were spoken of so often, I felt I needed to understand more about internal options for START participants. One existing opportunity for participants was to audition for what was then referred to as the Young Lyric Ensemble, with the 2019 Ensemble including two previous START participants. During my visit to a workshop, I had hoped to see a rehearsal process that deepened learning that was touched upon in START but in a more specific and structured way. The engagement was more intensive but, even so, I left the visit confused by what I had observed. The structure of the session was difficult to follow, and the connections between what happened before and what was coming after were not clear. My reflective logbook sees me write:

*The warm-ups were participant-led which is great but clearly have not come from any place of understanding or instruction as to what makes a good warmup. The vocal warmup was worrisome and perhaps damaging with participants screaming out phrases followed by a quick relaxation of jaw exercise directly into tongue-twisters. They then all sat down, and the session moved towards conversation of the scene they were working on.*

Later in the workshop participants paired up for scene work, focussing on listening, and responding truthfully.



*It was difficult to ascertain what qualified as a 'good' scene. There were many indicative moments that were allowed to happen without question and emotive language used was held above tactical choices, such as 'she acts mean here' rather than 'she manipulates him' or similar. Some participants were grilled, others were left alone or praised. This is confusing. Not all participants got a chance to perform.*

The haphazard approach to scene study was difficult to understand and I wondered if perhaps I had just seen an 'off night' of rehearsal. Regardless, it did not feel that all the young people I had visited that morning working on START could move directly into this rehearsal space. There were a few participants that I could see thriving in this environment and relishing the opportunity to engage in textual analysis. For others, this focused exercise would have been too difficult to navigate due to their needs. There was a gap in Young Lyric's available offer for START graduates, as Lyric Ensemble worked via audition only and took on a mere 10-15 members. Thus, there was not opportunity for all START participants to progress towards this programme, nor its successor, SPRINGBOARD. There was a definite need for programming suitable for those coming out of START who wanted to pursue more drama-based activity. In response to the need for in-house pathways for participants, following Lyric's 2021 community theatre production, *Heart of Hammersmith*, a weekly intergenerational acting class was established. START participants now have opportunity to move onto this class post-project. Any participant coming from one of Lyric's programmes for underrepresented young people are given a bursary place to attend. There are also new initiatives being developed, including a technical theatre class working in partnership with London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. The observations and process of thick description enabled me to identify where gaps in provision occurred, where the delivery of START was not addressing the key outcomes it suggested it was delivering, and the many assumptions that were made about who was taking part on the project, which I considered through the initial work of building a theory of change.

### Contemplating theory of change

In May 2019, I arranged a half-day research and development meeting with the Young Lyric Team, including both leadership and START staff members, primarily to help me understand what they believed the aims and objectives of START were. This was in response to my reflective writing and continued questioning of what Lyric believed was happening during START and as a result of engagement in the programme. I was also curious to see if undertaking the initial work towards a Theory of Change might assist the team in articulating the mechanisms of change alongside expected outcomes. Using a large roll of paper, post-its, and pens, I posed questions and prompts to the team, asking them to jot down answers which could then be discussed as a group. My questions included:

- What is the ultimate aim of START?
- What are the activities involved in START?
- What are the inputs for the programme? (What does Lyric bring to the table?)
- What are the intended outputs and outcomes?
- What is the expected short-term, mid-term and long-term change?
- What are the pre-conditions for engagement in the programme?
- What are the assumptions that are made on engagement, for a young person to achieve?

The process was illuminating, with varied perspectives to the questions. Indeed, whilst the Director of Young Lyric had a clear vision of what the programme offered; this vision was not reflected in the responses from the wider team. Unity in the ethos of the programme, the content, expectations, nor ultimate aims was reached during our discussion. Two of the team approached the questions from youth advocacy, support, and therapeutic framing; whereas the other two viewed the programme from a creative perspective, advocating for artistic excellence and the development of creative skills leading to enhanced well-being, confidence and communication skills. I had hoped the planned session would provide clarity, yet I left feeling even more confused. It confirmed my observations of multiple disconnects between the artistic and pastoral aspects, and management and delivery of the programme. It also highlighted that perceptions of impact for the programme were plentiful and not always aligned to what was being delivered.

Working with the disparate groupings of ideas presented on post-its, I assembled a working Theory of Change (ToC) (see Figure 5). Using funding documents, I aligned what was currently being funded and worked these into the ToC. It was my intention to workshop this ToC with the team, past participants, and others to develop a robust document from which an evaluation framework could be developed. On reflection, I omitted this from my plan as I found that thinking about the programme in this way limited my ability to welcome plurality of voice and experience as I started to analyse interview data and observations with the intent of validating what Lyric was expecting from the programme, rather than what was being learnt and communicated by participants. This realisation echoed my concerns of evaluating from organisational bias, where the agenda is set (through defining of outcomes) by the organisation. The direction of evaluation can very often then be dictated by this agenda, omitting plurality of voice, most often from those who hold the least power.

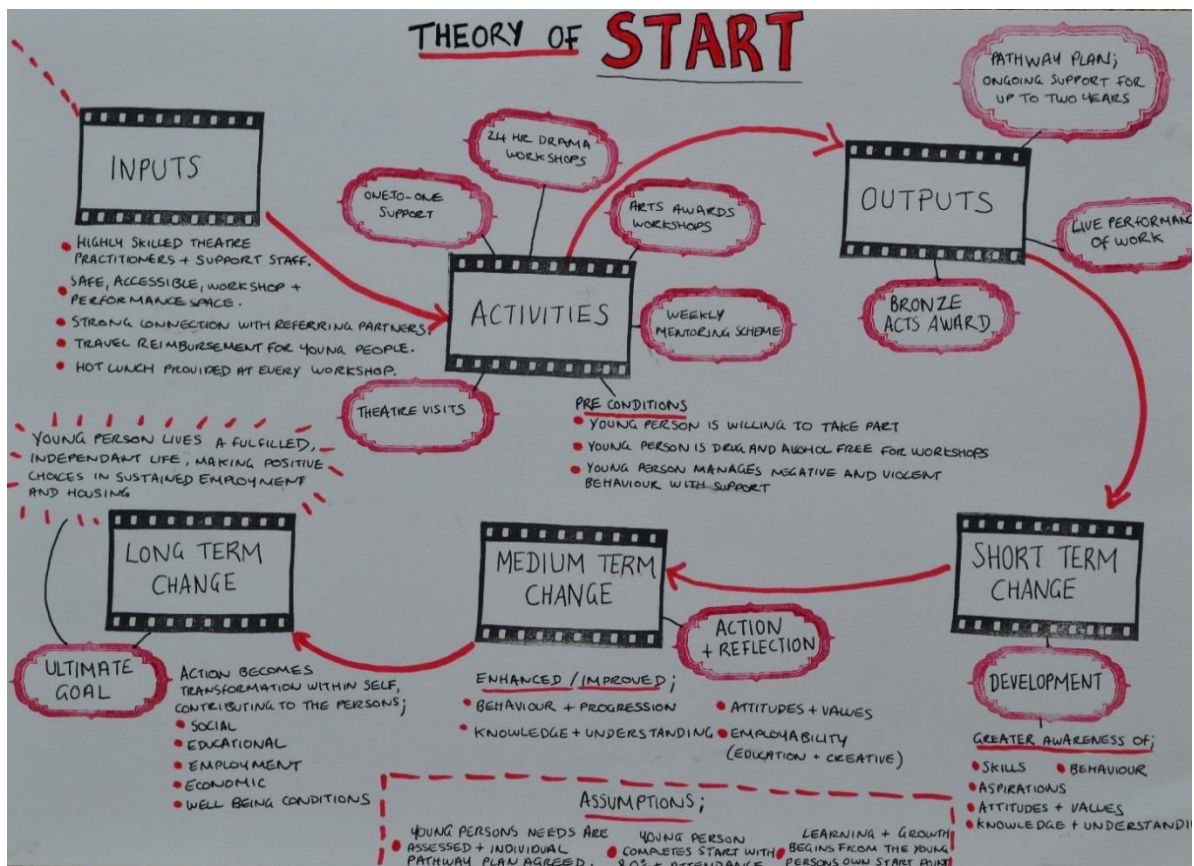


Figure 5

Highlighted in the above figure is the complex expectations of change Lyric held for the START programme. These expectations of change reflect the way in which the programme was delivered. As noted above, creating a robust ToC would need further consultation with young people involved in the programme should Lyric wish to pursue this model. This chapter utilised ethnographic observation and applied a reflexive research approach. My continued observations enabled me to conduct participant interviews and evaluation sessions with a stronger understanding of their experience based on these observations. The next chapter both challenges and validates some of these observations and seeks to place the voices of participants as the primary knowledge holder to consider impact from a holistic frame.

## Chapter 7: Considering impact from participants' perspectives

This chapter focuses on the participants' experiences and reflections, placing their voice at the centre of the discussion to consider the impact of START. I explain how interviews and group evaluation sessions were conducted and use a narrative approach to illustrate impacts, triangulated by researcher observation, and other collated data.

START's ultimate aim, to be a catalyst for change in young people's lives, is not unique within participatory arts work with underrepresented young people. It is important to stress the notion of 'catalyst for change', as opposed to 'transformation'. Claims of transformation, used regularly in the participatory arts in the 1990-2010s, were often used as a 'buzz' word without specific frameworks to evidence how such 'transformation' would occur, be evidenced, and by whom this transformation would be validated. Transformation by its very nature takes time, reflexivity, and longitudinal understanding. As such, I suggest 'transformation' as the goal is too ambitious given the time frame of participation and support attached to START, although 'transformation' of self can occur over time by the participant as an individual. Moreover, successful outcomes for one participant can be very different for another based on personal schema. Throughout my career as an educator, theatre practitioner, and evaluator, I have observed and listened to numerous participants make connections between experience and change: for one it might be engaging with activities across a full day, where they have previously been unable to do so because of anxiety or low self-esteem; for another it might be the act of putting forward a suggestion during a group activity that was heard, validated, and used to shape a discussion or activity. Often through retrospection, participants define the catalyst for change, that at the time was not of importance or relevance to them. As example, from 2005-2010, I led a youth theatre programme in the centre of London on Fleet Street. Young people came to the programme via recommendation from their schools. Some were selected because they had a real interest in theatre and wanted to learn more, others as a way of enhancing their communication skills and confidence, and for others still, as something to do during school holidays. The group of young people aged 13-18 devised their own performances based on varied themes, worked with a commissioned playwright and composer to create a piece specifically for the group, and once a year would tackle a book musical in an intensive two-week period. One young participant came to the programme via her school and took part in a week-long course. Thinking back on this time, I remember that she had engaged with the activities and appeared to have had fun, but I expected that it was time-bound, and I wouldn't see her again. Yet she did return, again and again. Across her time with us, I did not get a feeling that she was particularly interested in musicals or was building a knowledge base of them outside our sessions. What was evident was that

she enjoyed the social atmosphere and friendships she developed. She stuck with us for three years and then drifted away as she approached GCSEs. Twelve years later she contacted me to say ‘a massive thank you for all the experiences at [the theatre]. It was my first and only youth theatre experience but one that definitely influenced where I would take my life.’ She went on to say that she had just won ‘an Olivier Award plaque for my contributions to theatre’ having run the ‘UK’s biggest social platform for Musical Theatre fans’, and that she did ‘not believe any of this would be possible if I had not attended [the theatre] and grown in confidence. The impact and community [the team] built was a life changing experience for me and I continue to champion theatre for young people as a result’. I must say this unsolicited feedback was delivered just as I engaged with my first round of interviews with START participants and was a great reminder of what theatre can do. What can seem small or insignificant to an observer can hold incredible value for a participant and may be the opening to much bigger change later on as each individual comes to the project with their own agenda and areas for improvement. At times, this can take years to make this connection. This for me is a ‘catalyst for change’, an opportunity to learn, grow and experiment without placing restrictions on how a participant may choose to use and reflect on the experience in future. The organisation I worked for, and more importantly, the team I collaborated with, provided the opportunity, but *she* was and is the changemaker, and her subsequent actions her own. As developed in Chapter 2, Balfour (2009) refers to ‘Theatre of Little Changes’, where change cannot be conclusive, especially through the lens of another; it is a personal, incomplete, and complex process. Balfour also reminds us to consider the intrinsic aspects of the programme and find ways to bring this out in analysis of experiences. He suggests that continually writing evaluation reports can pull the focus away from the great work that is happening, noting as facilitators are ‘[c]aught in the habit of writing too many field and evaluation reports, the concentration is on proving the social efficacy of the work, rather than analysing the affect of aesthetics. The artistic dimension, therefore, is often relegated to the second division, a footnote to the value or purpose of the project’ (2009, p. 356). The relegating of aesthetic affect as secondary can be witnessed in the data collection and analysis of START, where there is but a mere nod to the vehicle used to invoke change. I, therefore, present varied perspectives to help articulate these ‘little changes’ and value of working through the medium of theatre to the discussion.

#### Drawing on past experiences of START

Before embarking on my interviews with START participants, I interviewed six Young Lyric Alumni who helped develop my understanding of their experience, providing a baseline to draw upon, as I developed an interview schedule that reflected the programme and experiences. Two of the most in-depth interviews were with past START participants. Following the interviews, I worked with the

two alumni to develop the transcript of our discussion into a short monologue about their experience on START. They then recorded these monologues and reflected on the experience of reading their own words aloud again. This then led to further conversations with them as they made additional connections in their own growth since taking part and considered changes post-project.<sup>21</sup>

Below is the co-created monologue Anila and I developed, which captures the essence of our longer discussion and highlights the impact of START for her, importantly, the forming of a friendship group; stronger communication skills; a focus on where she wished to head next in her studies; and a strong employment pathway working internally at Lyric and elsewhere.

*I um, started with START in 2017, I think ... I'm sure it's 2017... I'm sure ... because it can't have been earlier than that... anyways, so like I had a ton of mental illness issues, so I was in hospital and then through hospital I got in touch with like an LGBT youth group and then through them START. Yeah, so then they referred me to START.*

*I mean, I was expecting START to be like very different than it like was, so like ... I didn't realise that I was suppose to, like perform at the end. I didn't realise I had to like interact with the other people either ... I was really bad. Well, no, I was one of the really good people, like I didn't talk at all, but like that isn't good either. When I went in, I was like this is going to be just like school and I have to behave just like I would at school, then I realised this is nothing like school! It took me out of my comfort blanket because like when I went in, I was like, I am going to be like composed all the time. You can let loose, you can talk to other people, like that's fine. I made friends as well. Yeah, which is like, which is like important because I was new in this whole country, so like most people have, already have like those established relationships with other people and their friends from like, maybe say, school, work, onwards. Because I didn't have any of those like connections. On START we all had a common thing, that we could like relate to, so then I made friends. When I started START I had zero skills, like I could hold, I could hold a conversation, but it would take me like a very long time to like establish any amount of not like trust but like any amount of confidence to have a conversation.*

*START gave me more clarity, in terms of what I want to do with my life. Like before I was in START I was mostly like it has to be something psychology related, but I didn't know like what and also at that point I couldn't like go to university, then because I couldn't afford it without a student loan, and I couldn't get a student loan until I had lived here for like three years, so I was like just hanging around trying to figure out like what else to do. START helped me realise because of like the interactions between the youth worker and the young people that I want to do something like that, but a more therapeutic aspect. So, I liked researched, and I found like drama therapy is a thing. So, I am going to start this year... I'm doing it with Open University, just because I can't afford not having, I can't afford being at a full time Uni, because I need to work ... to be able to pay my rent and all that.*

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<sup>21</sup> Both participants took part in a recording session, where with the assistance of a filmmaker, they recorded their monologues. We then worked collectively with two professional dancers to develop an artistic response to accompany their monologues. They kindly let me share these pieces in a presentation I gave at the Children, Youth and Performance Conference in Toronto, Canada in June 2019.

*After START [Lyric] set up an interview with the manager of visitor's services, to be like an usher. I work I'd say about three, at least three times a week. And because of the ushering thing, I also got work at Battersea Arts Centre. So, I am front of house there as well. I also do Alumni here at Lyric, helping the lead facilitator. I think [Lyric] have recognised now that I have something to offer, like with support work. I think that I am good at it so yeah, it is definitely something I want to do more.*

*I am staying here forever, well not like forever, but for like a long time. [Lyric] saw something in me, to like help me within the arts, but like also like to give me more experience outside of it. That was nice, they are all very supportive and there's like tons of opportunity everywhere and that's exciting.*

My interviews and conversations with Anila provided me with great insight into how START was delivered from a participant perspective. Anila had so much enthusiasm towards her experiences with Lyric and good awareness of how she operated within the organisation. Sadly, in the months following this exchange, Anila's relationship with Lyric as an employer disintegrated, resulting in her leaving Lyric completely. Whilst the full story of this departure was complex and not fully made clear to me, the very things that she praised in her reflections with me in 2019; of trust, clarity, a sense of belonging, friendships, and feelings of validation were seemingly broken. It is within Anila's and other participants' stories that consideration of impact in the longer-term needs to be accounted for, both in the positives (as in my previous example), and the negative aspects as developed here. Whereas Anila previously connected her extended employment at Battersea Arts Centre to the work she had been given at Lyric, her perception of future employment opportunities may now be attributed to her own making or another supportive employer, given that her relationship with Lyric has ceased. Often engagement on reflection can hold negative impacts for participants, as connections of feelings of loss, anger, and inequality surface, as suggested by Belfiore and Bennett (2007b), Belfiore (2020), and Merli (2002).

Jayda and I also co-created a monologue using a lengthy transcript of our conversation. As with my interview with Anila, they had been provided with a multitude of opportunities at Lyric following their time on START and spoke highly of the experience.

*So, I started at Lyric when I was 18. This is my home. This is actually my life, this is so crazy. This is my favourite place in the whole world. IN THE WORLD. I haven't been many places and I know there are probably better places, but this is like [thumps on heart] the reason why like, I don't even have words but ... this whole building like, this whole vibe, the whole energy... [School] like basically told me like there is no career in the arts, move on, grow up, and I was just like, you're just a hater but ok. I thought I wanted to be a midwife. Crazy, look at me now. [Giggles] Ha, no babies! Went to the open day and I was like, I just need to go toilet, give me second, just ran out of the university and just went home. I had nothing in my hand, I was just like, right I need to figure a way into [theatre] 'cause I am not doing that.*

*My director on START sorta like took me under her wing and [gave me] my first experience in a rehearsal room with her ... [It's also] this whole idea that for like young people they are like so misrepresented in every way. It like really grinds my gears. 'Cause even when we do good, they don't like talk about it either. It is easier to talk about the negative then it is to talk about the positives. So, I feel like I have my new platform, like the smallest platform ever but it is something.*

*I feel like there is something about me that seems to be memorable 'cause I haven't been forgotten. It's the way it should be, it's what sets Lyric apart. They go where there are young people, they are very good at finding people. Listen, people are not goin' give you nothin', that's the one thing I know, and I been through a lot of things in my life and no one ever givin' me nothin'. My plan is to be an artistic director by 25. If that doesn't happen, I'll be ok but that'll be um ... I could've done betta. That's my plan.*

Jayda's experience of START opened up many opportunities on completion. As noted in the above monologue, the director on the project provided an extension activity at the end of the project, bringing Jayda in to observe her rehearsal process and learn on the job. This resulted in more assisting roles, including opportunity to tour with a small production which, by their own account, extended Jayda's knowledge of the world beyond Hammersmith. A few years later, through persistence and continued engagement with Lyric, Jayda was offered a chance to assist Sean Holmes, Lyric's previous artistic director, at The Globe Theatre, where they continued to have paid employment on a project basis. All the while, they continued to usher at Lyric and take on creative roles where possible, including directing a piece as part of Lyric's Evolution Festival for new writing and assisting on START. Indeed, becoming an assistant on START was a goal they put forward in early 2019, which came to fruition. Over time the connection to Lyric has lessened for various reasons: with Covid-19 closures responsible for cancellation of some opportunities<sup>22</sup>, extended time away from the building with other projects, friendships, and networks at Lyric moving onto new roles, and changing priorities within Lyric. In a 2022 follow-up interview with Jayda, a sense of belonging and of Lyric being 'a home' and a place of creative inspiration had lessened. Whilst still employed in a freelance capacity at Lyric through front of house roles and occasional projects, Jayda expressed feelings of being 'cancelled' at Lyric and relegated to non-creative roles. Although, through our discussion and subsequent clarification with the Young Lyric team, it was clear that some creative opportunities were put forward, but Jayda was not available for them. Evident in our discussion was the growth that had occurred since our last interview as a person, professionally and creatively. They talked about growing into the role and making their own pathway as a professional, although this pathway was heavily reliant on mentors and relationships they had developed. This working model so far had proven useful, with the expectation that these relationships would yield future work. /

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<sup>22</sup> Lyric honoured all existing contracted work when restrictions were put in place, paying freelance staff as applicable and/or negotiating with freelancers to deliver alternative work online.



*think the relationships I make with people is how I get jobs because I've realised anything I've applied for, I've never got, and I've applied for like, not a lot of them, but I've been rejected from all of them. I was like, ego bruised, but ... I'm better in person than on paper.* Jayda also reflected on growing up and taking more responsibility, turning 21 over lockdown, and acknowledging the life of a freelance creative is different to pathways of others their own age:

*I think that's the difference between like me and a lot of my friends ... they either go to uni or they've got 'real jobs' ... and they live at home. Whereas I work different hours and don't live at home.*

I used these two interviews in particular to help guide me into the first round of interviews with participants. Both participants highlighted building relationships and networks as integral to their feelings of belonging, of developing further work/employment and enhanced confidence. Both had pursued further creative opportunities, employment within Lyric and externally, making their experiences useful to forming a baseline for discussion. They had differing experiences within the workshop space, with Anila approaching theatre as a novice and not necessarily feeling the desire to be on stage, whereas Jayda had experience of theatre and a desire to act.

### Constructing interviews

It was important to me that I make observations and understand how START functioned as a programme before embarking on interviews with participants. The experience of observing and getting to know the participants helped to shape the format of the interviews. I drew from grounded theory which aims to generate a theory of the phenomenon that is being researched, in this instance, the experience of young people taking part on START. Using an inductive process, generalised conclusions based on a series of interviews and observations can be used to generate theory, as opposed to a deductive process that confirms a theory through evidence. This framing allowed me to move away from validating the vision of the programme, as set out by Lyric, along with anecdotes and testimonials I had been given, instead listening, and understanding participant experience as developed by the participants. I acknowledge that my use of grounded theory is not robust, as whilst I utilised key attributes and processes to develop interviews and analyse interview data, I did not follow this approach in its most rigorous and methodical form.

Grounded theory originated from the work of sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, with the publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1999), aiming to get more thorough preconceptions and examining the process of what is happening. There have been numerous iterations of grounded theory from both Strauss and Glaser, who developed divergent views on the

application of grounded theory, and others, notably the work of theorist, Kathy Charmaz. Charmaz formulated *constructivist grounded theory*, which aims to move it towards ‘the realm of interpretive social science ... without assuming the existence of a unidimensional external reality’ (2000, p. 521). Although Charmaz’s viewing of grounded theory was met with criticism, her constructivist epistemology is echoed in some of Strauss’s later ideas, as he moved away from a positivist ontological and objectivist epistemological framing towards a more interpretivist approach.

Importantly, a constructivist grounded theory places the researcher as part of the process and the interaction with participants important. Charmaz’s process sees the collection and analysis of data happening in tandem. Data is coded to create a series of categories that are complemented by memo-writing to note the connections the researcher is making when working with the data. Through numerous rounds of theoretical sampling, there is constant comparative analysis of the data via the codes. Ultimately, codes are combined into selective codes that form a theory. I conducted participant interviews drawing on this approach, asking open-ended questions to allow for participants to develop their answers in a way that worked best for them. Research questions were then refined as the emerging theory began to form. This proved useful, as my initial understanding of START was based on my reading around the project and information shared by the START team. For the interviews, I used the following questions as my guide.

Questions	Category	Probes
How did you find out about START?	Recruitment/Referral process External assistance in pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you hear about Lyric?</li> <li>• What were your feelings about coming to Lyric?</li> <li>• Were you interested in theatre/performing or was it something else that drew you to take part?</li> </ul>
What are your creative/artistic interests?	Prior knowledge of the arts Creative skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you take part in any theatre projects before?</li> <li>• Did you like drama at school?</li> <li>• What creative things do you do?</li> </ul>
Why were you interested in taking part in START?	Setting up discussion: is it arts-related or personal journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it an interest in the arts?</li> <li>• What other projects could you have taken part in?</li> </ul>
How would you describe your experience on START?	Personal experience Asset-based approach to gathering knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in skills? Technical and/or personal?</li> <li>• Enhanced friendship group?</li> </ul>
Did taking part change the way you see theatre/art?	Perception Embodied knowledge Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you more aware of the arts/theatre?</li> <li>• Have you seen productions outside of Lyric since taking part?</li> <li>• How do the arts ‘fit’ into your life?</li> </ul>
Have you learned any new skills or enhanced any existing skills by taking part?	Building of creative/artistic skills, social skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has taking part enabled you to increase your knowledge of theatre?</li> <li>• Do you feel you have enhanced your communication skills? If so, how?</li> <li>• Have you used any new skill outside of Lyric? How?</li> </ul>

Is there anything you valued or enjoyed about the project as a whole?	Art skills Community Friendships Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the length of the project right for you?</li> <li>• Did being based at Lyric, feel important to your journey?</li> </ul>
As you look back on your experience since starting at Lyric, are there any moments that stand out in your mind?	Personal development Asset-based Communication Self-directed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you describe how these events affected you and how you responded?</li> </ul>
What is the main idea that you will take away from this experience?	Personal development Artistic Pathways Strengths – self-development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion what is the most important lesson you have learnt through your experiences with Lyric?</li> <li>• Akin to Most Significant Change typed conversation</li> </ul>
What is it you aim to do next? How does this experience aide in moving you towards your goals?	Aspiration / pathways into arts and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you see yourself in 2 years' time? Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years? How are you going to action this?</li> </ul>

Through an inductive process, the first round of interviewing and analysis brought about further questions that were then explored in round two, and so on. I conducted four rounds of interviews with new participants, totalling 17 initial interviews (START worked with a total of 29 participants during this time, not all of whom wished to take part in interviews). Participants were invited to attend a further interview at a later point to reflect on their experiences on START and consider how time away from the programme may have changed their interpretation of experience, pathways, and overall impacts. Although I had hoped to conduct more, only nine follow-up interviews took place due to difficulties in reaching young people post-project, especially in light of Covid-19 closure of the theatre.

To provide holistic understanding of experience, I could have approached others associated with the young people, such as families and social workers. I dismissed this idea as the journey for participants was their own and their findings did not need validation from outside. That is not to say I did not talk with parents and friends at the final sharing and join in their celebration of their loved one's achievements. I have included observations and reflections of the START team, Lyric as an organisation, and my own as researcher, in some instances, to triangulate findings. This was a delicate balance as I did not want to dilute participant voice with other stakeholder voices as this would, in my opinion, exacerbate positions of power. This, of course, relates back to understanding who the stakeholders are within START and *whose* voices should be heard. Ultimately, I have developed the following discussions, findings, and recommendations by placing participant voice as paramount and have attempted to ensure all participants' voices are reflected, not just those that fit within an organisational or researcher narrative. The benefit of this approach was that discoveries are tightly connected to participants who I had opportunity to engage with whilst they took part in

the programme and are therefore representative of what the programme offered from participants' perspectives.

The interviews opened up new lines of enquiry for me as a researcher. Each participant had a unique experience and, therefore, reflected on their experience from their own perspectives. When analysing the interviews by cohort, there are collective examples of how the delivery model impacted their experiences. Then, looking more widely at START, some impacts can be attributed across all START cohorts. Each interview commenced with me reminding participants about my research and the consent form they had signed, along with how I would use what they shared.

### Inviting plurality through participant reflections of START

I began with a few standard questions before letting participants take the lead in the conversation. I asked each young person how they heard about START and why they wanted to take part. Each participant came of their own volition and spoke of their interests in the programme from varied perspectives.

Theresa, a young transgender participant, enrolled on START in 2019 following a lengthy period of time where she had not been going to school, as she suffered with severe anxiety and the trauma of bullying. She had supportive parents who encouraged her to attend START, accompanying her to and from the theatre. In her follow-up interview I asked what drew her to the programme.

*Because at this point in time, I feel like there's not many resources or places I can go to, most are very unsupportive of people like me. And especially around this area<sup>23</sup>, it's kind of hard to find those sorts of places. And, you know, I saw this, particularly after the interview I had with [Young Lyric Staff Member], I found hope in this space, you know. It's not just like you come in, and then you start immediately as you come in, you have a sort of idea from having a chat with someone with experience. And the chat I had ... made it seem very promising. So, I had no reason not to try it... I probably knew that there would be something that would happen, but I didn't really think about it, because I thought the good parts would outweigh, you know, everything I've seen or been through. When I originally came here, I had no problems regarding anything ... and no problems with people here. ... I just thought maybe this could be a chance where I could develop as a person.*

Theresa's ability to reflect on her experience was astute and wise beyond her years. She drew on the idea of START being a hopeful place and worth taking a chance on. This sense of hope and the support she had perceived in the enrolment process and first few sessions unfortunately disintegrated over the six weeks, making it difficult to keep returning to the programme. She

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<sup>23</sup> Theresa is referring to West London.

persevered and completed the programme, but carried with her feelings of resentment to how she was treated and posed interesting provocations in our interview, which I return to later in this chapter.

Chloe also took part during 2019 and came to START as an alternative to staying in her room.

*I live in a hostel that is for young people, and they've got like a pin board and there was just like, loads of different things to do. Like, they had START, ... going to college courses, and different courses or short courses. And something just made me ask my support worker, to see if there was space. I just felt like I wasn't doing anything.*

Chloe had an interest in acting and singing, having done a bit in school, but had no plans to try and carve out a career as an actor. Throughout the six weeks she reported that she developed her creative skills and was encouraged to sing as part of the final piece. This opportunity to test herself, stretch her skills, and perform to an audience was both daunting and rewarding.

Similarly, Elijah also came to START to fill the time and because of his curiosity and interest in creativity. He was living in a hostel and was given information about the programme.

*When I came to START, I had nothing to do, nothing that, nothing to do that I could tell people that I was doing. And I was quite interested, generally speaking in creativity. So, I thought I'd try and since it was good at the start, I kept coming. ...I did drama before but I wouldn't really consider that I learned anything. It felt like art for the sake of art. It felt like ... I'm not sure that people are good at digesting art. Because they don't know what art is. So, anything passes as art. I feel like that's the kind of thing that I went to before, for something that was art for the sake of art because it's supposed to be creative, but it's quite cliched. It's stencilled art.*

Elijah shared very little of himself with the group. He was an observer of people, taking in the wider picture and only adding to discussions when he felt he had something important to share and, on occasion, to challenge fixed ideas. I got to know him in short moments, as he would open up and then retreat inwards. I knew little of his life, as he chose not to share, and I respected that what he chose to share was what was right for him. He voiced no plans for the future, no immediate desire to move towards training or employment. He wanted to stay where he was in a hostel and spend time with his thoughts. He suffered from ill mental health and would apologize when he was not able to articulate his ideas fully, citing depression and a tendency for his thoughts to become 'fuzzy'.

He enjoyed engaging in philosophical discussions and unpacking the meaning of things. In our interview he considered the meaning of art:

*It's expression that is what it is. If we can speak with words then we call that art... Usually we communicate via words and body language, pictures. It's quite linear and straightforward.*

*But theatre for example, you combine them, same as with a book... Art is to communicate, but let's say some art communicates to something that's conscious, something that's known. And then some art asks questions...*

I asked Elijah if his journey on START helped him to answer some of his questions about art.

*I guess so... but not. The dialogue I have had in the past is very open and I keep asking myself what is art, or what is good art. Sort of analysing all the art and where it comes from. And sometimes its not nice to do that because it's very judgmental and that's kind of the point where I stop asking myself questions, because I don't feel like I have the right to do that... because I end up judging people ... the artist... and I feel like I might have missed the mark, and it's not a nice feeling.*

When asked what he was going to 'take away from START', or if there was anything useful from the experience that had informed his way of thinking about art, his creativity, or things he might want to do next, I was met with silence for forty seconds and then:

*I think I just learned about the puzzle of theatre. But not anything... I think what I learned about theatre is 'this plus this equals this'. But anything creative, imaginative? No. Just the industry of theatre, sort of...*

Had I applied a positivistic approach to evaluation and been looking for indicators of change aligned to the intended outputs and outcomes of START, Elijah's journey could be classed as a failure. Throughout his written feedback, pre- and post-pathway planning, interviews, and group discussions he noted little improvement in START's intended outcomes of enhanced coping mechanisms, self-confidence, communication, and artistic skills. He also did not re-engage with education, employment, or training on completion of the project. Then again, he did not come onto the project with any desire to do so. It was Lyric's intended outcomes and those of funders that suggest re-engagement as the ultimate validation of successful completion of the project. Yet, through our discussions and my observations, if you consider his arrival point on the project, his struggle with depression, and ability to communicate his ideas fully, put next to his determination to attend a six-week course, to arrive on time, and perform in front of an audience, I considered that the programme resonated with him to some extent. Herein lies the conundrum, Elijah was not able to identify change within himself at present, but his experiences and voice needed to be heard and validated. I expect his story would not be shared in a more traditional form of evaluation as it did not demonstrate fulfilment of the given outcomes. Nevertheless, to me this is to celebrate the 'little changes', such as Elijah's peaked interest in directing, although he had already decided nothing would come of it, and perseverance to communicate effectively on stage. I often wonder how Elijah is doing and would have enjoyed following up on our discussions. Whilst on the project, his phone broke and he had no money to replace it, nor did he have regular access to email. After completing

START, I held a few reflection workshops that he attended, having sent him away with a piece of paper with the dates and times. When these ended so did his connection to Lyric.

Most participants noted an interest in performing, to some extent, having engaged in other projects that were drama based or through experiences at school. A few entered the programme with a specific desire to be an actor, whilst others wished to learn about theatre more widely. The differing reasons for taking part and understanding of what the project entailed impacted their experience and perceptions of peers across the project. Those that came to 'act' often became frustrated in the early weeks with the lack of movement towards scripted work, whereas those that came for 'something to do' found the latter weeks difficult, as the ability to engage in discussion, play games, and explore had ended, with focus being placed on creating a polished product. Explored further in this chapter, many of the young people aspired to be actors and they expected assistance in pursuing their passion to the stage as they reached the end of the project. These expectations were managed with varying levels of success.

#### *Opportunity and sense of achievement*

Young people in London have a host of programmes that are made available to them delivered by charities, arts organisations, training providers and other organisations, each with its own unique selling point, way of working, and ethos of social change. This is, of course, if the young people know where and how to access these programmes. Some of the young people I interviewed had taken part on other programmes prior to START, while others were coming to the experience with no idea of what to expect. Most participants spoke with a resonating gratitude for being given the opportunity to take part on START, a sense of hope that START had provided them with an opportunity to move forward in their personal goals. Lyric was a known place for some of the young people and being given the opportunity to take part at the theatre with a final sharing on stage heightened the experience for them.

Nearly all the participants voiced a sense of achievement in what they had accomplished for themselves, and as a collective. This was of great importance to them and was often attached to goals they had set themselves coming into the programme, manifested in the final sharing event. Sarah shared with me that she was proud of herself for completing the course and sharing her passion for dance in the final sharing event.

*[The director] told me to make the movements go bigger. Because that the first time when I rehearsed it, it was okay, it had energy, but it didn't have facial expressions... but by the performance it was big. But I needed to let more smiles in. So [at] the actual performance, I*

*had facial expression. The dance was about freedom. In secondary school in Black History Month, I auditioned for a talent show... but unfortunately, I didn't get through. It was like in Year 7. ... but now I got to dance and show my dance of freedom.*

Sarah carried with her this desire to share this particular dance for 8+ years and, therefore, the achievement of doing so resonated deeply with her. During her interview, Sarah made connections between her experience on START, other experiences in her personal life, and her aspirations for the future. She aspired to set up her own dance school and teach children in Sierra Leone. START served as a 'step in the right direction', an opportunity for her to grow in confidence and think about a different way of working.

Richie linked the achievement to an increase in confidence, reflecting on previous performances he had been a part of:

*Usually, I have to be convinced to do stuff like this. Because like, I've done art projects, where I've just like dropped out. But then as soon as I heard it was theatre, I went Yes! Sign me up please. ... [I have] more confidence, because when I came, well, everything I've done before like I've done it in like background in the chorus .... not really having my own spoken word. And when I did have my last one, I just blew it, it was just nerves and everything and like not having enough confidence to perform it. So, it's nice, like, to learn over the weeks to perform with confidence and with volume and with good stage presence. I wasn't too scared to perform. ... So, when I looked out into the crowd, I was like, oh- this is nice. ...*

Simone connected the achievement to the collective: *I was so proud. I was really proud of what we created.* Robson noted a sense of achievement for himself and improved confidence in his communication skills. *I'm more open now. Usually when I am outside, I see people passing and they say hello to each other. Now I can say 'Good Morning', I can walk past and make conversation.*

Devji reflected on his experience during START. It reads as a glowing account and could easily be used to validate the power of the programme. It touches upon many of the expected outcomes of the programme: strengthened understanding of theatre and creative processes; enhanced social engagement; forming of friendships; a boost of confidence; and a sense of resilience.

*I almost didn't come to START. But I did, just came in, and it was unlike anything I've ever experienced. START is more than just come in, play games ... they kind of helped me put my foot in the door, almost in the business. It kind of showed me the whole creation process of creating a play, and [forming] a bond with like, the other performers, you know, and we've kind of come up as a family. START has done a lot, it's really boosted my confidence. It's really kind of changed my life around and I can be so grateful for where I am right now. Sure, I have negatives, I still have personal demons. But yeah, I have a lot of things to be grateful for.*



I appreciated Devji's ability to reflect on where he was presently at in an astute and nuanced way. Over the project I got to know him as an intelligent and warm individual, looking for a place to belong. He was able to locate himself in the present and acknowledged how the programme assisted new viewings of his future. He also was able to consider his personal circumstances and how START couldn't change these, but still allowed him reprieve from certain feelings and situations. Devji was dealing with a tricky homelife and his own mental health, or *personal demons* as he called them. Indeed, when meeting him a few months later his demeanour had changed. The structure of START, with a daily check-in, and a safe space to be creative, was no longer part of his daily routine. The strides he had made whilst in the safe bubble of START were no longer there and, without specific goals to look forward, he reported feeling 'stuck'. Although a few suggested pathways were discussed with the START team, none were actioned, nor followed up with the START team to my knowledge. Devji attended a few evaluative sessions that I ran post-project and often asked me about other opportunities, but sadly there were not any at Lyric to put forward. Eventually, like so many young people who have participated in START, there was no further contact with him. It is disheartening to consider experiences like these, where participants reflect on START as being a catalyst for change, with a willingness to change and a desire to do more, only to be met with apathy and disorganised attempts to schedule pathway planning meetings.<sup>24</sup> For Devji, change as a result of START appeared to be possible, as, there was a willingness there. Fundamentally, in order to make change happen, there needed to be continued engagement with Lyric and other support networks to develop a holistic pathway wherein he was supported in his artistic journey, but also development of the employment skills needed, and the addressing of both his mental health and home life. Expecting change to occur without such support is unattainable and does a disservice to the participant who is asking for help in making change.

Celebrating successes and changes participants perceived in themselves is integral to the success of the programme. Throughout the five projects I use to form this case study, young people also voiced a sense of achievement in sharing their work with an audience. Participants were encouraged to share details of the final performance with friends and family. Some knew from the first day that they would be inviting a host of supporters along to see them perform, whereas others held back

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<sup>24</sup> Over the research period the pathway planning with participants changed dramatically as highlighted in Chapter 6 and further developed in Chapter 8. 2019-2020 participants were to be given six months of support post-project in seeking employment, education, or training from the START team. Participants in 2021 were not promised as much support, although the expected outcome was, and continues to be towards employment, education, or training. As of 2022, pathways offered are creative industry based only, either via internal pathway with training either on SPRINGBOARD, a weekly acting class, or onto an external training programme. Employment opportunities are not promised as a condition of engagement on the programme. A focus on building of soft skills that are transferable and widening of understanding of theatre is promoted.

from inviting others. There were different reasons for selecting to invite, or not invite people: uncertainty of what the group was creating and a feeling that it wouldn't be ready or 'any good'; feeling that they were not producing something of a quality they wanted to share with others; and for some not having people that they wanted or could invite. Devji suggested the opportunity to perform for family and friends was: ... *joy and excitement, the lights in my eye, this is what I want to do. This is where I want to be, and I never felt that or notice that before.*

Simone held off inviting her family until the last few days but was pleased with the encouragement they provided:

*My family thought it was really funny, they thought it was good. Like I was just saying it was rubbish. They thought I down played it down a lot... And I was like, because it wasn't looking the way it looks on the last day! ... My parents, I asked them, Did you understand what was actually going on? And they were like, Yeah, and I was like, that was my biggest worry. That's always my biggest worry when I'm doing something, are the audience actually following what's going on. Because I hate watching shows and I'm lost.*

Elijah valued the comments that he received from the audience after the performance but hadn't invited anyone. When asked, he said, *this experience was for me, I didn't need to share it with others*, and also said he wasn't *proud of the work and it had too many confusing messages*. This led to a discussion about his desire to direct, so that ideas would be through his 'interpretation' and one message. He reflected on the devising process and found it confusing that different scenes, developed by groups, were woven together for the performance. His 'take' was that the final piece did not have enough 'directorial authority' to it to make it cohesive. This was a perceptive and critical viewing of the piece that was somewhat warranted. Conversely, other participants on this particular project highlighted feelings of ownership being stripped from them once it came to developing the script. Reflecting on another project, Riley commented that the directors, *took our ideas [but the] lines we had to say didn't sound anything like what we had written*.

Inviting friends and family can be difficult for a multitude of reasons which needs consideration. Many of the young people taking part have vulnerabilities and lived experience that they wish to keep separate from their engagement with Lyric. I suggest, they know best who their champions are, who they would like to see in the audience, and who should be absent. Whilst the project culminates in a sharing for an invited audience, the focus on it as a product needs to be carefully considered by Young Lyric. The Lyric Team, as a whole, comes together for START sharings, with an in-house audience of between 5-10 staff attending to ensure there is an audience, giving participants ample praise for their hard work.

### *Changing perceptions of others and self*

For many of the young people, START put them into social situations that were outside of their comfort zones, with some finding this difficult. Participants revealed difficulty in trusting people in their lives, resulting in active disengagement from forming new relationships. Some reported that START encouraged them to look inward and examine why they placed judgment on others and how to work towards acceptance of others.

**Theresa:** *And I think every time someone new came in, you would have that sort of, you know, almost like you're kind of judging them on their sort of appearance on what they would be like, you know, because there was one kid, I think there was one person who was really tall ... and he looked tough. A tough guy. So, my first thought would obviously be: No, I'm scared of this person. They look intimidating. But through the process, I found out that that's not true. And he had a really big heart. But at the start, it was quite up and down sort of feeling because you don't really have that sort of bigger picture on everyone's personality, if you know what I mean. Because after a while, like, midway through, maybe towards the end, I sort of knew everyone, and forgot this idea, because I knew what everyone's like...*

**Simone:** *I think I learned a lot about myself, and how I work with in different groups. Because like, I've never been in a group of like, 20-year-olds in class and stuff like that. And it's like adjusting to everyone's, like, probably not problems, but everyone's like different things. So, I think I maybe learnt to be a bit more understanding about people's situations.*

**Lisa:** *At moments, it was challenging... Like, I don't think that's something that you wouldn't expect. Because everyone's coming from different places. They've seen different things. They've been around different people like to come into this environment, and no one knows each other. And we're all trying to work towards the same thing. But we don't really know what we're doing in the beginning ... I think everyone's got their own personality. [...]*  
*Everyone in that room was so different. [...] Like, they wouldn't, like be my kind of people or whatever... Or like, they weren't my people but they're my people now. So, it's like for me, it's like you can't judge a book by its cover. You don't know what's coming around the corner.*

On some occasions, participants suggested the project wasn't for 'people like them', selecting to situate themselves as 'outside' the group, placing the experience of START as for others and not themselves. In analysing these phrases amongst the wider narrative provided, it appeared that they placed distance between participants they perceived to be more vulnerable, and at other times marking a divide between those who were there to further their creative interests and those that were not.

### *A sense of belonging, self-esteem and self-confidence*

Participants had varied experiences, with many suggesting that they felt they became 'one big family' whilst working on the project and a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves. Indeed, this is a key part of teambuilding exercises and drama-based work and an expected

outcome. There is a need to create camaraderie in the early sessions to help participants bond as a group and find ways of working together collaboratively. Each director/facilitator used different activities and ways to work with participants, with some working better than others. A common reflection for participants was around their enjoyment in early sessions where they began to get to know each other. Most facilitators helped to develop a group manifesto, ground rules and how they would like to be treated, along with 'getting to know you' activities, building confidence and rapport amongst the group. The group atmosphere created also plays an important role in developing participants understanding of co-creating a piece of theatre. From here, participants' experiences diverge, with some feeling that their ideas were well reflected in the devising process, scripting, and development of the piece; whereas others felt their autonomy was stripped and it became a vision of the director under the guise of collaborative undertaking.

Devji commented on the 'supportive nature' of the other participants. *We kind of became a second family. So, we kind of help each other, push each other up.* Devji used START as an opportunity to explore feelings surrounding his internal and external struggles.

*I would walk out the door and I would just be smiling, smiling and laughing and talking. And I felt like, I didn't have a care in the world. I didn't need other people, other strangers coming down the street to accept me for who I was, if I can accept myself, which is fundamentally what START did, it completely changed me.*

Self-acceptance, personal growth, and developing self-confidence featured within many of the participants' feedback. In completion of an induction survey which acted as a baseline for pathway planning, nearly all participants ticked the box of wanting to 'improve confidence' at the start of the project and most eluded to this with a one-point uptake in this area or noting it in their extended written or verbal answers. Some linked this to a desire to become better at feeling confident in talking to peers and people they didn't know, putting forward suggestions and their opinions, as well as having their voice validated.

Devji enjoyed the freedom to write monologues and scenes, using aspects of himself in developing characters. Seeing his words come to life through others allowed him to see a 'version of me'.

*I kind of learned a lot about myself, I learned a lot about what I can and can't do. And I've learned to be more accepting of myself and said, you know, what, we have struggles, there are things you can change. But who you are, essentially is you. You're you, you're nobody else and START really kind of help hammer that home.*

Richie found confidence in being able to try out new things without judgement, suggesting:

*It was inclusive ... that was one of my big like, I want that to happen, which there was. And I don't know, it was just the atmosphere was relaxing. Like, you could be yourself without fear of judgment, which is very good, when you're probably doing something embarrassing. And like silly or stupid, just to let go.*

I present Richie's comments here as he said them, but my observations did not read the same as his reflection. During the project, Richie and another participant got into an argument and, from that point on, there was a tension, with this participant enlisting her friends to join her in making fun of choices Richie made. This impacted Richie greatly, but he found ways to work around it and ignore the negativity, yet his free nature and 'risk taking' in his acting choices subsided after this altercation. The START team kept things in check, but behaviour management and support was placed more with the other participant and her friendship group, rather than with Richie, a decision I highlighted with the team as problematic, as it validated their behaviours and placed Richie as 'Other'. It was not surprising to me that he did not select to take part in further activities at Lyric after this experience, instead choosing to focus on his studies.

#### *Participant ownership and agency of START*

Ownership<sup>25</sup> of thought and of stories that are shared verbally and through writing exercise, such as personal monologues, is an integral part of a participant's START journey. A sense of agency is also important to participants' growth and is discussed within the description of the project and reporting, yet my observations and reflections from participants suggest that opportunity to have agency is dependent on the START delivery team, especially the lead director. Across all projects participants were given opportunity to express themselves, add to conversations, and develop ideas in the first few weeks of the project. As the project evolved and moved towards the devising, scripting, and rehearsal of a sharing piece, the opportunity for agency narrowed, dependent on director.

*Simone: The only thing I didn't like was the tone set in the space. It was like very playful and then it got to like week five, and it was like, 'Okay, we need to work'. And it was just like, there was no blend. And I feel like we should have just started the show earlier, but we maybe should have set a more professional tone from the beginning, so it would have been easier to ease into like show mode.*

It was in the playful part where Simone and her peers were given freedom to test out ideas and have an opinion on shaping character. The directors then took their ideas and developed a script. The resulting script was over-written and many of the young people were not happy with how it was developed, feeling that their ownership of character was taken away. Similarly, on a different project, Theresa reflected that she found improvisation and devising difficult due to her anxiety. Much of the work on this project was developed via improvisation and then devising around subjects until text emerged that felt suitable. My observations, over the course of a few sessions, were that it

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<sup>25</sup> I define ownership as the feeling in control of oneself (body, feeling and thoughts) and agency as the ability to control or direct action.

was not only Theresa that appeared uncomfortable with this way of working. The participants were often asked to repeat what they had said, given edits, and then asked to try it again. This produced a rough, somewhat set, script that still had some improvisation within it. Reflecting on this process that was anxiety-inducing, Theresa commented:

*What would happen if one of us did speak up? The directors would probably try and shut that sort of emotion down. They're trying to say, 'oh no, there's nothing to worry about'. It's all, 'just try, again', and you are made to do it again it and that isn't a good feeling to have.*

The experiences of participants are heavily influenced by the START team they were working with, where there may have been conflicts in approaches, expectations, and experience. For example, unlike Theresa's reflections, participants from a different project held more connection to feelings of ownership of their own journeys and agency in making decision on the direction of the piece of theatre. Robson, Luke, Andrew, Sarah and Angela took part in a reflective session I held where we created a movement piece based on their reflections. They began by jotting down their reflections, highlighting key moments that they thought were important to tell through movement, including feelings of nervousness at the beginning, acceptance by the team and each other, playing games, creating together, and embracing their learning as they left the programme. As they developed the section on 'creating together', I observed a real sense of just that, collective working where they would test out ideas, incorporate new thoughts, and give equal weight to all five voices, a skill they developed during the project. They reflected that the START rehearsal space was 'creative' and *we were allowed to make suggestions that [the directors] tested out with us*. Incidentally, in viewing the performances, I felt this one was the strongest and it was evident that the content came from the participants, showcasing their talents including Sarah's dance, Lisa's singing, Andrew's guitar playing, and Robson's Charley Chaplin impressions. The evaluation movement piece we created in response to their experiences was beautiful to watch and held moments that illuminated statements they made in interviews and feedback. This included a section where they helped one of the group up from the floor in slow and fluid movements to represent the feeling of moving from isolation before the project to feeling supported whilst on the project.

#### *Inconsistencies in support, care and compassion from the START team*

Participants' reflections on a sense of belonging, feeling valued, and being heard were very often connected to how they felt the Lyric team engaged with them on a personal and collective level.

Devji noted that one of the START team members:

*... really helped boost everyone's spirits and boost everyone's confidence and make everyone feel like their 'self' is enough. [...] [The START team member] makes everyone feel that when they come to the space, they can be exactly who they are, which can really help.*

Ty noted he connected with a [START team member] on the same project, *He's real you know? ... He let us bring ourselves into the character.* Conversely, Devji suggested this team member lacked in the same skill set of making the group feel like they were 'enough': *I admit there were times, but they were rare.* He rounded this out noting, *... in the end, it's not just about one specific person. In the team, it's a group effort.*

Theresa described feeling well supported at the start of the project yet struggled to receive the support she needed as the project went on. Speaking about the [START team] she noted:

*[They were] disappointing me a lot more, [...and] would be very unreliable, not really seeing how much I was affected by certain issues. There was one instance where I was feeling so anxious and so nervous, I was so sick, that [they] had to take me out. And I was really sick. And [they] said, [they] ... said that [they'd] be 10 minutes. ... 50 minutes had passed, and they were rushing around...[They] didn't really seem to understand how much that would affect someone like me. So that really made me question. Am I able to trust [them]? Because someone in a high position, the biggest quality you probably should have when working with young people who struggle with issues like anxiety, or even gender identity, or whatever it maybe, is to be a trustworthy person and support them. You know, and that's something that us people look for when we try and find someone, before we provide trust in them...*

Theresa went on to describe being left out of communications sent by this particular Young Lyric staff member post-project to come back into Lyric to complete Arts Award activities, meet up with peers, and complete a CV workshop. She was upset by this as it felt intentional. She questioned this with staff at the time and was told that they would find a time to fit her in, as her schedule 'didn't work with the others'. That rescheduling never came for follow-up activity on START and therefore, her trust in Lyric was broken yet again. I asked why she decided to come in for an interview with me given these issues. Theresa said it was the best way to give voice to her experiences, and that she still had trust with me, as I had always included her and did what I said I would do.<sup>26</sup>

*I mean, if there's nothing left for me to get from START, or from the groups or anything, I really can't be bothered at this point. I've just been through so much judgment or whatever, I don't need extra. I didn't need that.*

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<sup>26</sup> Theresa returned to Lyric 18 months later to take part in Lyric Young Associates. She subsequently met with the Director of Young Lyric to discuss her experience on START. Her desire to be a part of theatre and carve out a pathway where her voice could be heard, allowed her to persevere and find ways to continuing engaging with Young Lyric. I maintain that the relationship I built with her; checking in with her family and the follow-up conversation with the Director of Young Lyric made this possible.

The inconsistency of care was something I had also noted in my reflective logbook on many occasions. Some young people were given the attention and support needed to thrive in the workshop space and post-project, whereas others seemed left to fend for themselves. In some instances, this was because the young person chose not to continue engagement post-project, but in many instances, it was because no further contact was made with them. There is a need for Young Lyric to develop protocol and a system by which the team engages with young people post-project (this is followed up in the recommendations made in Chapter 8)<sup>27</sup>.

### *Building pathways and hopeful futures*

Many of the START participants left the project full of hope and ideas for the future, with newfound friends, connection to theatre-makers, and plans for returning. As connection to Lyric subsided for some participants, due to a lack of follow-up care, with broken promises of interviews for employment or training opportunities, or connections to new programmes, disillusionment set in for some. Indeed, getting participants to return to Lyric for follow-up interviews often proved difficult, even with those I had built rapport, because there was nothing left, or nothing inviting for them to return for, other than a chat with me... and to most, I was complicit with Lyric. The raising of hopes and then failure to fulfil on promise can be crushing for some young people, and I often felt sadness in being a part of this process, perpetuating false hopes. Additionally, the friendships the participants made and the expectations they held for these friends, often never come to fruition, leaving a further void in the participants' lives. When attending a follow-up evaluation workshop, I was running a month after completion of START, Tina said,

*I don't usually get excited because there is somewhere to be ... it was just because I wanted to be here. It was like okay, I get to go to Lyric today. [I got used to that] being here for six weeks... When I went back home [after START] ... I was slipping back into my old routine before Lyric and then when I remembered that we will come in here today. I was like yes ... I am ready to come this morning. I get to see [my friend], and we haven't talked since the START finished.*

Tina still considered those on the project her friends, even though they had not spoken since the end of the project. The sessions I held on evaluation helped to rekindle friendships, but I suspect they were fleeting until the next session and then, ultimately, many of them would dissipate as the sessions ended. Ty saw the sessions in a different light. Often quiet and selecting his words carefully, he piped in following Tina's point to say, *It feels productive when we come here.*

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<sup>27</sup> Strengthened protocols are now being developed. There is now a full-time Outreach Officer in place that works with participants in developing post-project pathways and keeping them informed of opportunities.



Whilst lovely to hear Tina and Ty's comments, the gathering was instigated to aid my research and to provide an opportunity for the group to reflect on their experiences. Further opportunities to meet as a cohort were not planned and this highlighted the precarious nature of the relationships. Whilst START builds the group up through drama-based activities and provides the social environment for them to form friendships, at the end of the six weeks the brokering relationship of Lyric as provider for 'things to happen' ceases and friendships then need to be nurtured on their own. The ending to the programme can be upsetting and unsettling for some, with feelings of joy from performance being replaced with feelings of sadness and loss, to the friendships formed or opportunities participants thought they would have post-project. Ever straightforward, Elijah commented, *You need us to work together and be friendly, but how much of it is real?*

It was difficult to witness and listen to many participants post-project reflections and connections to Lyric. Feelings of being let down by Lyric post-project were prevalent in some interviews and often overshadowed the impact of the experience itself. Noah took part on a project in 2021 and was supported with an application to move onto training at National Youth Theatre. He was successful in securing a place on the 6-month course, a wonderful outcome from his participation in START and well deserved, as he committed himself to the project. In a follow-up interview, I asked about the experience with National Youth Theatre. Noah had glowing things to say about it. At the time Lyric was auditioning for its SPRINGBOARD project (two-year part-time training programme where young people have opportunity to perform in main house shows) and I asked if he was going to audition. Noah commented, *I didn't get that much information. But I got like a small email.* That was it, no phone call, personal message, suggestion to come in and talk about the opportunity, even though SPRINGBOARD was specifically designed to reach young people in West London who wanted to pursue more training, and there was a desire from Lyric to work with those that came through the START programme. When asked about further engagement and opportunity at Lyric, he said, *I asked [Young Lyric team member], but [they] haven't got back to me. You know, [they are] always busy.* Noah went on to say he was going to stay with NYT, citing really good facilitators, clear opportunities, progression routes and friendship networks. Here again, whilst Lyric suggests it provides pathways, the sporadic nature of the given pathways made available during the research period, and lack of in-house trajectories, hold back continued engagement. Furthermore, the disorganised nature of how communications occur with the young people post-project leads to feelings of alienation, especially when information you are expecting does not come through. Indeed, why would you return if people in positions of power say they will do something and never do it?

Fellow participant Mario also cited lack of communication and mixed messages post-project. As a young person with severe anxiety and acute mental health needs, Mario recognised that he needs clear instructions and expectations to succeed. In our follow-up interview, he also noted that he had repeatedly asked for a chance to try ushering or front of house at Lyric (over a prolonged period of time), and was promised some shadowing sessions, and then maybe an interview by a START team member. By the time of our interview, he had given up on asking noting, *Obviously, [they] didn't hook me up and I blame them, but it's fine. It's fine. It wasn't meant to be.* He did go onto say, *I have a job now. I work in Hammersmith just down the road ... and it is keeping me busy which is definitely helping my mental health.* I asked how he got this new job:

*I have, a person that helps me look for jobs. I don't think he's my job coach. But like he, he works with NHS and I have mental health illness. ... And one time I said to him, yeah, I want to work in hotels, this and that. He was like, yeah, we'll look for some hotel jobs. I got an interview, didn't get the job. Because apparently, I wasn't like, I wasn't as adventurous as they wanted me to be. ... I wanted to stay in one role for a little while. I wouldn't mind checking out the other roles and doing other things but I kind of wanted to focus in one bit and get started into work because I've never worked before. So that first hotel job didn't work out. Then I went to a job fair, where, this is where I found my job. I literally found a guy from an agency. ... Anyways, found an agency. He basically hooked me up with a job like three days later. And it was in a hotel, but this hotel is very high demand. Very, very demanding. I didn't like it. So, I asked for a different shift. And then I got one in Hammersmith. And it was like, a really nice job, but I'm starting to dislike it.*

Mario was proud of his ability to go out and get a job on his own. He continued to develop more of an answer as to why he wasn't enjoying his role, and that it is partly due to his mental health issues such as the manifestation of paranoid thought. Mario was reflective as he considered what the job has given him:

*I've noticed that having a routine is very beneficial for me. I thought it wasn't that important. To be honest, I saw a routine as kind of like a restriction on my life. I like having to wake up for something.*

These stories of being let down and inconsistent approaches must also be viewed in tandem with stories where young people felt very supported. Some of these participants felt well supported both on the project and post-project, and others had already developed solid pathways in place from external sources, before engagement with START. Those that had pathways already secured were able to find nuance to their experience with Lyric, as their trust and futures were not reliant on connection with Lyric. What remains unclear, throughout the interviews, is why some participants were given opportunity via Lyric and others were not, when so many were asking for the chance. Through observation, I suggest this was at times down to likeability, with START staff creating

stronger relationships with some participants, or there was a particular opportunity arising at Lyric that suited the aspirations of a participant.

In the participant interviews and post-project evaluation sessions I asked participants to tell me about their plans for the future: what they wanted to do in the immediate and thinking more long-term. The responses were, of course, varied and personal. Some were very specific and others more aspirational in their framing. My subsequent questions were about how they were developing the pathway to achieving these goals and ambitions. In my early interviews I expected to hear about how the Young Lyric Team was assisting them in finding these opportunities. As the projects continued, I brought with me more awareness of the fractured structure of pathway planning and held lower expectation that opportunities would be forthcoming from the Young Lyric Team. Nonetheless, there were some wonderful examples of pathways following START, for example Angela, who took part in a 2019 START project, and demonstrated a real talent and interest in acting. At the time, Arts Educational's (Arts Ed) Acting Foundation Course was run from Lyric's rehearsal studios. As part of the partnership agreement, Arts Ed provided one bursary place a year for a student nominated by Lyric. Lyric put Angela forward for the bursary. She thrived on the Foundation Course and had added support from a Young Lyric Team member through ongoing catch ups to ensure she was not feeling too much pressure, was making friends and connections, and that monetary issues were not impacting her ability to take part. Angela was then given the opportunity to audition for the 3-year BA in Acting programme and successfully secured a place. As this programme is not housed at Lyric and her time on the programme coincided with the theatre's closure, ongoing support was not maintained.

Some participants had clear plans that they had developed themselves or in collaboration with parents, foster parents, social workers, or mentors. Although he had not been attending school for the past year, Richie was looking forward to returning to education:

*Well, I'm going to college in September, I'll be doing a performing arts course. Hopefully, well not hopefully, I've enrolled already! I'll be doing a level two course in performing arts and if I do good in that I will be pushed up to the level three. And I'm currently debating whether I should go to uni, to do another set of either performing arts or directing course. Just so I have like, all my options. Because I've got makeup, which can be used for special effects and everything, then if I have the acting, then that's another part and then I'll have directing, I'll be a triple threat.*

Richie had a clear understanding that he needed to build his skill set and understanding of the industry he was planning on being a part of. He came in with this understanding and a desire to be a part of a wider community:

*Honestly, I want to do anything, just theatre in general. It's just a nice place to lose yourself. Because I mean, like you could be on stage and immerse yourself in like this whole new narrative of a different character and get into like, whatever is happening with them in their life and they're different and feelings and emotions instead of focusing on your own, or being behind stage where you're so focused on making sure everything goes smoothly and goes right, that you're not too like, focused on anything outside. It's just a community and a space where it's just, you all come together to make something beautiful.*

When I asked what START had offered him in pursuing his goal, it was the active engagement with producing a piece of theatre and performance aspect that was most important and resonated with him.

*The physicality of it all, like, it was just one very short show. And like, by the end of it, I crashed for like three days. So, I'm like, I need to work up both my stamina and get healthier. Because that's what I want to do, I want to go into acting, and I want to do this, these massive performances, with like, musicals and everything. And those like, two-hour, three hour shows seven times. And like, you need as much energy and as much stamina as you can muster.*

Whilst Richie was specific on how he was going to achieve his goals to enter the industry as an actor, Devji also was interested in pursuing acting, yet did not have a plan. *It's up in the air right now. Well, my future is something I really would like to do acting in a real theatre, maybe in like, in a small TV show or just, whatever I get, whatever opportunity I get.* He was pragmatic and understood he would need a job to support himself whilst working towards this goal, but this goal was from an aspirational place without defined steps to achieve this success: *I love being creative. So, if I get to do something creative, that's a dream come true for me.* From my understanding, the Young Lyric Team put forward a few suggestions for Devji to consider, but nothing came of these. It is not clear why this was, but as noted earlier the Young Lyric team's haphazard approach to finding appropriate opportunities that I witnessed, in addition to inconsistencies in follow-up discussions, suggests that, over time, participants disengage with Lyric when nothing comes to fruition. Narratives such as Devji's led me to query how Young Lyric can signpost young people to opportunities, encourage continued involvement with Lyric, and manage expectations, especially in entry to performing arts. The feelings and confidence generated by the START process and sharing with an audience uplifted the participants and broaden their aspirations, yet pursuing a career in performance can be difficult. Using Devji's desire as example; to get a role in theatre or a 'small TV show', is realistically not an

achievable immediate outcome, as Devji knew little about the industry, didn't have a CV, or any other training that would support this pathway.

Other participants wished to pursue pathways outside the creative industries. Lisa, for example, was interested in pursuing a career in childcare or beauty therapy. Lisa thrived on the course and grew in confidence and leadership skills. The Young Lyric Team asked her to take on an assistant role for an upcoming project working with a West London Virtual School, which works with looked after children. Lisa had experience of the care system and was able to bring lived experience to the role. She very much valued the experience and saw it as a positive step towards her future.

*The fact that I've kind of fallen into a job that helps me, that allows me to work with kids, and is I feel like that's the kind of career I want. So, kind of like being a [youth support worker], because I feel like I'm coming from a place where they're coming from, I mean, not always exactly the same place. But I can, I can relate, I can understand young people, I'm not old school. And even when I am older, when I'm 30, 40, I'm still going to be able to understand because that's where I came from. ... I was in care when I was younger. So, I understand that, I can talk to them and I can relate and I can be like, this is something that you can do to help your situation ... like speaking to the social worker ... and making sure that you have this appointment. There's so many things that you're entitled to as a looked after child, but a lot of people just don't tell you because, I don't know if it's because they don't want you to reap the benefits, or because, I'm not sure.*

Lisa continued to engage with Lyric on a few more projects and took up a beauty therapy course as well. She maintained contact with the Young Lyric Team until she was halfway through her pregnancy, at which point the theatre closed due to Covid-19. To my knowledge, re-engagement with her from the Young Lyric Team did not happen when staff returned to the office.

On a few further occasions, participants were given opportunity to take on short project based work, or further opportunities arranged by the Young Lyric Team. These experiences were met with limited success as the infrastructure to fully support the young people was not in place, with limited time to nurture and support well-rounded in-house experiences. As example, one participant was given opportunity to assist on a weekly project with young people aged 11-14. The project was fraught with issues due to inconsistent leadership on the project, resulting in difficult behaviours with the participant group. With the team's focus on behaviour management of the wider group, there was little time devoted to working with and supporting the young person acting as assistant. Such incidents should provide pause for Lyric, to consider how best to work with young people when moving from the position of project participant to work placement, or paid freelancer. For many, it is their first opportunity to be in a paid role, and the expectations of them are unclear, as are the channels by which they ask for help or clarification on what they are supposed to be doing. It is

Young Lyric's responsibility to ensure such opportunities are well managed and the young person is provided with the skills and support to undertake a role.

Throughout all the interviews, group discussions, and evaluation workshops I held, I was amazed at the willingness of participants to take part in reflective activity, offering their opinions, and considering their futures. As I had established relationships with them through my time observing workshops and chatting with them during lunch and breaks, there was an openness to our discussions, and mutual respect that I was there to listen and receive what they wished to discuss. This led to richer data than surveys, focus groups, or interviews based on targeted questions. Through my own reflexive practice and acknowledgment of subjectivity, I was able to place myself within these conversations and learn from them as they reflected on their experiences on START, as well as their own lives. The metaphoric distance travelled from October 2018 to the present has been vast in my thinking and connection to the world. The opportunity for participants to sit down with me and take part in an interview was also valuable for some participants. On a few occasions, participants would come back to me later, if I happened to see them in the building, to add to a story, or mention that they had thought about something we had discussed, or to share good news with me. On reflection, I wonder if our interviews were, for some, closure to the experience, a last look back at their time at Lyric.

I conclude this chapter by considering the possibilities of ongoing reflective practice within the START programme as a meaningful way for participants to process their experiences. Most START teams would end session with a quick check out: asking participants to say one thing they enjoyed from the day; something they would like to work on tomorrow; or an idea they had. Whilst useful to bring the group together to have that moment, through careful development of reflective questions and use of different methods, such as free writing, talking with a partner, post card responses, etc., there is potential to engage participants in more active reflection. Through active reflection, participants are given opportunity to develop this skill and, if well led, find ways to employ reflection in their daily lives. Taylor suggests when participants are '... actively engaged in critically exploring the implications of their own and others actions...' they can create a situation where they can 'submit to and control the nature of the experience they are having, a phenomenon' (2003, p. 5-6); or what Boal would refer to as *metaxis*, creating meaningful participant-as-observer relationships within a group. It is the creation of these participant-as-observer relationships and the ability to evaluate the outcomes of those experiences that I have strived for. The very nature of participatory arts work sees participants taking part, observing, and reflecting on their own, as well as others

contributing to the given task. In naming this activity, participants are able to take it and process it in their own way. Furthermore, finding ways to evaluate the experience of not only the participation, but also the observation and reflection participants engage in, holds new learning within the space and beyond that should be acknowledged within wider evaluative framing.

## Chapter 8: Addressing and redistributing power

Chapter 8 concludes the case study, utilising the knowledge base put forward in Chapters 4-7. This chapter commences by addressing problematics of START and its current framing, through discussion of power relationships, and the changing socio-political landscape of participatory arts programmes, using the data collated through the multi-method research approach. I use examples from the research process to illuminate these problematics. The problematics discussed are not issues that Lyric faces alone and are reflective of many participatory arts programmes, highlighting the importance of this study and its contribution to the growing evidence base of participatory arts impact. The chapter concludes with a series of recommendations for Lyric and other creative and cultural organisations to consider in future engagement with young people.

### Challenging power dynamics: reclaiming participation for the participant

Systematic dampening of young people's voices is ever present in our society. Through the allowance of this practice, we perpetuate the hierarchical placement of what is expert knowledge, most often placing organisational and 'adult' voice as powerholder. Through strengthened valuing of lived experience, provision of space for underrepresented voices to be heard, and developing strategy *and* action through co-creation, I posit more meaningful programming can occur, with a deeper knowledge base created. The shifting of power to make it more equitable between stakeholders goes deeper than the creation of a youth steering group or enlisting consultation with targeted groups. It involves a culture shift in language, action, and reflection across all stakeholders. Using the body of evidence collated on START, I put forward the following as suggested shifts to reclaim START for the participant and challenge its existing format.

Following my field research and analysis of interview and observation data, I revisited the literature produced on START to address the aims and objectives of the programme. As developed in this critical case study, the existing literature does not always reflect what is happening within the workshop space, nor in the pathways created post-project. Through research of START's lengthy history, I noted changes in how the project was described, the terminology used, intended outcomes, and how participant stories were presented. Some of these changes demonstrated reflexivity on Lyric's part, responding to the needs of participants and to clearer language in describing their work, whereas other changes were more aligned to 'speaking' the language of funders. In some instances, descriptions of the programmes and outcomes demonstrated a lack of attention towards changing ontologies and ways of working with young people. To address some of these concerns, I used various approaches to tease out new knowledge. Most notable was the use of



textual analysis, using a dialectical notebook approach to interrogate motivations, historical and social context, and the interconnectivity between organisational, individual, and societal framing, and highlight how language exacerbates positions of power.

The following demonstrates the tension between ‘languages’: that of the funder and organisation, and language of a responsive, asset-based programme that supports participants to become changemakers. Within the below example, I suggest the needs of the funder and Lyric are met, yet the participants are placed as service users, or clients, rather than being an integral part of the decision-making process surrounding their intended outcomes and the change they wish to see. It reads as START being developed *for* and not *with* participants at the heart of programming.

The following is a short description of START from a 2018 proposal:

*START is a unique arts training programme for disadvantaged young people who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training). It is a learning alternative which challenges participants to change the behaviour which had previously prevented them from succeeding in mainstream education and employment settings. We use drama to identify, explore and address the underlying causes of participants’ disengagement. We help to broaden their perspectives by developing a range of characters and scenarios in which they can rehearse alternative behaviours in a safe environment. They explore issues which are relevant to their own lives and foster a group ethic of inclusivity, accessibility, encouragement, respect and affirmation. For many this will be the first time they have been willing to learn.*

On first read, this appears to be a straight-forward transactional participatory arts model: a disadvantaged group of young people are encouraged to attend, they complete activities which help them gain confidence and skills, and then they finish the programme with a stronger sense of self and plans for the future. Drawing from Moufee, if this description is approached with an antagonistic perspective, a further reading of this could be: Lyric will use its cultural influence to help those less powerful obtain a temporary place within hegemonic social and cultural structures. Whilst this may be harsh in its reading, the language used needs careful consideration in framing discussion and illuminates my early assertion of multiple ontological readings. Below I have deconstructed the text using a dialectical note format to address where power dynamics are in play.

Word or phrase	Dialectical notes
Descriptors that present a deficit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of the following words (discussed below), situate START within an applied theatre context. These descriptors signify to the reader (funder) that Lyric has experience and knowledge in this area.</li> <li>• Does the use of deficit language negatively impact participants?</li> <li>• Could moving towards person-centred language be helpful? People’s self-image and confidence are connected to how others speak about them, the words used matter.</li> <li>• Deficit language can negatively bias a reader.</li> </ul>

Unique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is its Unique Selling Point?</li> <li>• It follows a traditional place-based approach to working with young people through applied theatre.</li> </ul>
Disadvantaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined as ‘put in an unfavourable position in relation to someone or something else’ (Oxford Dictionary).</li> <li>• ‘Disadvantaged youth’ usually refers to young people with less chance to achieve within education, society, and personally.</li> <li>• Other phrases used synonymously: at-risk, vulnerable, socially excluded, marginalised.</li> <li>• Terminology of ‘at risk’ is simplistic as it focuses on the personal attributes of young people. It draws attention to what is ‘wrong with them’ rather than what might be wrong in society/schooling.</li> <li>• Use of marginalised young people places focus more on the relationship with society and schooling than on the person (Riele, 2006)</li> <li>• A move towards ‘marginalised’ or ‘underrepresented’ young people would be more appropriate as it sets it within a strengths-based approach, working towards collaborative goals, rather than disadvantaged which is firmly within a deficit.</li> </ul>
NEET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is an ‘attractive’ word to funders and policy makers as a label, they understand it.</li> <li>• There is a stigma attached to the acronym that is unattractive to young people.</li> <li>• It is a deficit term with negative associations.</li> <li>• NEET captures a group of young people who are not following a typical trajectory to ‘accumulating human capital through formal channels – namely the labour market or education’ (Mascherini, 2019, p. 2).</li> <li>• Underachievement in education often leads to young people becoming NEET, although it is not always the case.</li> <li>• Lacks in individualisation.</li> <li>• Reasons for being NEET are numerous. The term is often criticized for being heterogenous.</li> <li>• Defining the barriers faced by young people would aid in understanding label of NEET.</li> </ul>
Mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The term is used to describe schooling that is for young people following a typical trajectory. It is referred to in this paragraph as a social norm, a shared benchmark or standard.</li> <li>• It demonstrates a binary: mainstream or alternative provision</li> </ul>
Training and learning alternative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is meant by these terms?</li> <li>• Alternative to what, classroom-based education?</li> <li>• Training can refer to development of self through enhanced skills.</li> <li>• Both terms give the programme an authority and weight to it.</li> <li>• The terms, especially ‘learning alternative’ are misleading as the resulting qualification is an Arts Award, Level 1 qualification. It is most certainly a positive step for participants and to be included but is not a replacement for ‘other’ education, instead a complement.</li> </ul>
‘Challenges participants to change the behaviour which has previously prevented....’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deficit language applied, moving ‘challenge’ to a strengths-based perspective would place value on the participants.</li> <li>• The ‘change’ here implies fault with the participant and does not take into consideration the socio-political and educational structures in place that have prevented access for the young people.</li> </ul>
‘We use drama to identify, explore and address the underlying causes of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying person first language would combat the power struggle and place ownership with participants. ‘Participants use drama to ....’</li> <li>• There is a fine line between drama therapy, applied theatre and the approach Lyric takes with START which draws on applied theatre models.</li> </ul>

participants' disengagement.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is Lyric properly equipped to assist participants on this journey? Why is the focus on disengagement to formalised education? Would a model of developing participant-centred approaches be more useful?</li> </ul>
'We help to broaden their perspectives by developing a range of characters and scenarios in which they can rehearse alternative behaviours in a safe environment.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above, the placement of the participant appears secondary and in need of Lyric's guidance.</li> <li>• This sentence appears to follow a Boalian way of working, through Forum and/or Image Theatre, yet there is not sufficient evidence in application of this occurring.</li> <li>• Through researcher observation, a range of characters and scenarios were used, but changing the trajectory of character choices was limited.</li> <li>• Broadening of perspectives- it is unclear what the perspectives are about</li> </ul>
'They explore issues which are relevant to their own lives'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moving the phrase towards more autonomy for participants would improve this outcome, such as 'participants are given agency'.</li> <li>• It is expected that participants are given opportunity to contribute to the content. Does this actually occur within the workshops? Evidence suggests it occurs at times but not across all participants and projects.</li> </ul>
'For many, this will be the first time they have been willing to learn.'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is a big claim that needs evidencing.</li> <li>• It places Lyric as authority and changemaker.</li> <li>• It connects to a wider 'agenda' that sits outside the control of the participant.</li> </ul>

The textual analysis and questioning of specifics through a dialectical process as explored above can be used by creative or cultural organisation to refine *how* they discuss programming. By shifting the language used within funding proposals, marketing, and advocacy documentation, the dominant hegemonic structure can be realigned, moving an organisation from position of powerholder to a more open reading of provider, in collaboration with participants. The above deconstruction of the START project description led to discussions within the Young Lyric team and a subsequent rewriting of how the programme is communicated. The team have continued to consider terminology, with a stronger understanding of audience and key messaging for specific audiences reflected in the 2022/23 programming. I further advocate for consultation with a group of potential stakeholders to refine text that defines an experience they would like to take part in; and celebrates engagement from an asset-based approach where individuals are given ownership and agency of their experience.

There is also need for a power shift in the placement and recognition of participant voice, agency, and ownership within the fabric of many participatory arts programmes, providing opportunity for participants to be knowledge holders and changemakers and have this reflected in reporting. I recognise that placing of organisation as knowledge holder and changemaker is standard for funding proposals and reports, as the funds go to the organisation to action the 'change', hence making them the authority. It is my assertion that finding ways to disrupt this imbalance of power is needed to return knowledge and power to participants across project planning, implementation, and evaluation. I pursue this line of enquiry in Part 3, with the development of a participant-centric

framing, fully aware that it invariably places power with the participants, which sits uncomfortably next to, and at times in opposition to, the organisational viewing of participant experience and impact.

Returning to Lyric as example, there is a need to be mindful of the internal organisational power dynamics, including an internal friction, as START re-establishes its placement within the artistic, educational, and social ethos of the organisation. On one hand, it is seen as a flagship programme for young people, a valuable asset to Lyric, demonstrating its' ethos to nurturing young people from all backgrounds; on the other, it is often seen as a drain on resource, as an expensive programme to deliver, and a heavy workload for staff. Lyric must consider how START fits into its vision as a programme and how the young people taking part become part of the Lyric community.

To further the disruption of Lyric as powerholder and push towards that of opportunity maker for participants to create their own change, there needs to be cultural shift in programme design and implementation. This shift needs to reflect the specifics of Lyric's key priorities and vision surrounding young people and the provision of creative opportunities. Lyric considered this shift in the development of its newest programme, SPRINGBOARD, a two-year programme for talented young artists to develop their craft outside of the traditional drama school setting. SPRINGBOARD responded to a gap in the market for young people in West London to gain quality theatre-based training. START needs this same care and attention, a review of what the gaps are in provision, consultation with young people they wish to recruit for the programme, and to build a reimagined programme for today's young people. There is much to celebrate over the programme's long history, yet continued churning of a tired model, one that has essentially stripped away the aspects that made it a successful programme in its earlier form, is counterintuitive. A revitalised model would enable Lyric opportunity to move away from problematic aspects of the programme and redefine its core mission to align with a desire to provide young people with a creative platform to develop skills and pursue further creative endeavours, rather than a focus on entry into employment, skills, or training. Such change is not without issue, as funding is often connected to the end goal of employment, skills, or training.

Through this research process, I maintain that with the loss of its initial funding from DCMS and LBHF Council by 2014, START retained its commitment to employability skills and mentoring, as they resonated with funders and the instrumental value of the programme was more easily evaluated through these outputs, and indeed more attractive as a programme. Over time, parts of the original

model have been discarded. What is left is a mismatched and, quite frankly, confused model. Since Lehmann joined in 2020, the strategic planning of START has taken on a stronger rooting in the artistic development of the young person. There is a backing away from work readiness skill development for the general workforce. Such a change towards development of artistic skills is welcomed, but the literature and vision need to be addressed to fit this evolving programme. Whilst the programme was innovative in its roots, it still holds a 1990s sensibility and must challenge itself to move towards contemporary practice and ways of thinking.

In the early iterations of START, Lyric was able to apply positivist approaches and demonstrate impact through use of literacy testing, gaining of a literacy qualification, and a variety of successful employment and educational outcomes. I pondered many questions around the previous iterations of START and the data used to define impact. For example, with the literacy testing that appears to have been a mark of excellence for the programme: What were the parameters of the first test?; Did participants want to take part in this testing (both at the beginning and end)?; How did this element of the project impact the overall experience of START?; And did receiving a literacy qualification enhance participants lives, future prospects, entry into education, employment or training? A former Young Lyric Team Member suggested literacy testing was difficult to administer, as many participants did not want to engage. Although speculative, as the reports do not outline the literacy testing fully, once specific strands of funding were exhausted that required literacy testing, it appears they were replaced with an Arts Award qualification, which is not surprising as this coincides with a push from the Arts Council and London's bridge organisation, A New Direction, to deliver more Arts Awards. In its current iteration, much of the validating proof is now gone, outside of a Bronze Level Arts Award, which to a prospective employer may carry less of an impact. Additionally, the reduction in employment pathways made available in-house, opting instead for movement onto in-house acting classes or entry to SPRINGBOARD, needs careful consideration. The programme is valuable and holds excellent opportunities to develop creative skills, enhance communication skills, and confidence, but it needs further reframing if it is to genuinely report on impact with young people.

Lyric has, for the most part, kept START away from the limelight, with little written about it on their website and only the occasional use of photos. I value this approach as, overall, it demonstrates respect for participants and a desire to focus on participant success rather than draw attention to their 'marginalised' or 'NEET' status as a criterion of engagement. Indeed, following team discussions surrounding this, the website now reflects more considered language. I would welcome a more participant-centric approach to evaluation of the programme and the information provided to

funders, that reflects the small changes Lyric has already implemented. Whilst researching and working at Lyric I had opportunity to engage with some of the funders of START. Many were open to interpretive evaluation, and this is evident in the ways in which they seek evidence. Most funders requested a yearly or bi-annual report reflecting progress against the intended outcomes of the project. These reports enable Lyric to write specifically for the funder and, given the loose structure, comment on a variety of outcomes. Developed further in Chapter 9, there is a need to reimagine what evaluation looks like and consider the evidence base and learning collected. I suggest that rather than 'sugar coating' answers to prompts, such as 'tell us about areas for improvement' or 'barriers to your project', Lyric takes a more reflexive approach, placing themselves within these answers. Often reports provide explanation, but the onus never sits with Lyric, rather on circumstantial or external factors. For example, poor recruitment onto a project would be put down to the referring partners not being responsive, or too much happening for them to respond due to the time of year. A higher-than-expected dropout rate of participants on a project would be smoothed over with reasons of the participants not being in a position to take part due to personal circumstances, having numerous absences, or causing too much disruption. Whereas, through my research, I would suggest there was a period of time where there was an apathetic approach to recruitment; taking easy options, not investing in getting to know new referral partners, and not really seeking out young people most in need of START. This had a knock-on impact on recruitment and retention. Additionally, some of the young people did not fully understand what the programme was about and selected not to return because they felt it was not for them or had thought it would be more towards work-readiness than acting. There were, of course, participants who were not in the right place in their lives or needed to focus on their mental health and were supported to leave. There is a need for the Young Lyric Team to renew relationships with referral partners to ensure that they fully understand the programme, as they are the first point of contact for most participants. With the appointment of an Outreach Officer in 2022, this work is underway. This will ensure young people have a better understanding of what START provides over the six weeks, what potential pathways may be post-project, and redistribute power, allowing young people further agency in making the decision to take part on START. I content that the embracing of failure through honest reflection as an organisation demonstrates a commitment to participants and the integrity of the programme.

#### *Placement of participant voice within complex power struggles*

Lyric's existing evaluation reports adequately provide an overview of project and participant engagement, evidencing improved skill levels and supporting evidence to demonstrate their

positioning of outcomes. In some more recent reports (especially where funders have provided opportunity for expansion), Lyric have noted areas of weakness and reflexive interrogation of key points, such as a decrease in recruitment and plans to revitalise recruitment approaches. Notably missing from many of the reports is the voice of participants, with only a few carefully selected quotes provided. The reports lack a holistic framing, with participant voice at the heart of discussion, and little inclusion of divergent voices. It is not surprising that participant voice has been minimal due to the vulnerability of some of the participants, coupled with challenging behaviours, that often mean self-reflective thinking is held closely by participants. Lyric employs a case study approach to present discussion of participants' growth, selecting two or three participants to showcase. Historically, case studies cover three areas: background of participant, approach, and outcomes. All areas are written through the lens of Lyric as authority and what START *did* to achieve the outcomes for and with the participant, firmly placing power and ownership with Lyric.

The following is an extract from a START funding report. The case study commences with the participant's background: age, reason for taking part, and current life circumstances. This is followed by the 'approach' the START team employed when working with the participant, elaborating on pastoral care and behaviour management.<sup>28</sup> The following outlines the outcomes for this participant:

*The team saw huge improvements in Person B's self-esteem and confidence over the 6 weeks. Person B's enthusiasm for the course and realising her own dream was apparent to everyone and extremely contagious to her peers in the group. This confidence was realised in the final performance when her character took on a significant solo which she performed with authority to rapturous applause from the audience. Person B looked extremely humbled by the experience and very touched by her own achievements. [...] Person B successfully passed her Level 2 literacy which was a momentous achievement. The team were able to support her to apply for the further Level 3 performing arts programme called Generation Arts. Person B was successfully admitted on to the course. It would have taken Person B a year to gain a Level 2 qualification which she was able to achieve within 6 weeks and enrol onto a Level 3 course which she will complete at the end of the year.*

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<sup>28</sup> I made a conscious choice not to include the full case study due to ethical considerations. Whilst the participant is referred to as Person B, the background discloses personal details. The full documentation was made available to funders and to me as a researcher, yet, given my experiences at Lyric, I cannot be sure if this young person was made aware that this information was written about them and shared with others. General consent to use evaluative information is obtained from all participants, but I maintain that participants should be made aware of how their information will be used and at minimum, their reflections used in the creation of case studies, rather than a predominately organisation-led reflection.

I appreciate the measured language and perceived care for the participant that was taken in collating this short case study, ensuring the accomplishments of the participant were noted. It is observational in its approach and the writer used descriptive and congratulatory language when talking about the young person. What is unclear is how Person B felt about the experience, leaving me with many questions. Did she feel that her self-esteem and confidence had improved? Did passing the Level 2 literacy exam come as a surprise to her? How did the participant prepare for the Level 2 literacy exam and what was Lyric's role in the preparation? Why, without Lyric's help, would it have taken her 2 years to complete this qualification? Could she not have enrolled in another project with a different organisation that delivered the same award? There were most certainly positive outcomes for this young person, especially as the Lyric team saw, what they perceived as, immediate change, but without the participant situating themselves within these achievements and being given ownership of their actions, the case study holds less impact than if it were triangulated by their own experiences. I also question the ethical implications of attaching impact to participants and describing their 'stories' without their input or knowledge. A reimagined version of participant case studies using a narrative approach that is developed *with* a given participant would demonstrate a change towards placement of power and ownership of change whilst humanising the data.

#### *Re-interpreting statistics and narratives*

The need for redistribution of power can also be seen in the hegemonic reporting structures Lyric and other participatory arts programmes need to adhere to. I acknowledge that this comes from the need to 'prove' a programme's impact. Experience and narrative therefore become condensed into bitesize pieces to convey large ideas. Nevertheless, I challenge Lyric and others to be bold and transparent in reporting, allowing for participants' journeys to be owned by them, even in reporting. As example, Lyric's reporting of START for funders naturally includes information about participants' pathways post-project. The following statistic comes from a 2021 report:

44% (4 of 9) have successfully returned to education. Three are working on their A-levels and one on GCSEs. All are undertaking some performing arts-based or media studies modules.

I preface, that I use this above example to demonstrate my line of enquiry, not to place fault, as technically, this is an honest report of pathways as per the funding requirement. What the report fails to explore is the context and ownership surrounding this statistic. Context was not required by the funder and the narrative is not in Lyric's favour, as it does not connect the experience of START to the outcome. This particular project fell at the end of a school year (end of June into July). One participant in the above statistic attended a pupil referral unit at the time of the project and had



been given permission to attend START.<sup>29</sup> They were planning on moving to a new school the following academic year for GCSEs and had made this clear to the START team from the onset, it was more a waiting game to see where they would be accepted. Two further participants had plans to move back into education for their A-levels, prior to enrolment on START, it just happened that they were not in education at the time of the project, so were technically NEET. The fourth young person did not articulate a desire to return to education during the six-week course, yet in follow-up discussions noted that they were returning to education. When I asked about this move back to education in an interview, the participant noted that this was the best option and what their family wanted. The correlation between participation in START and movement back into education was not made by the young person.

This example highlights many questions on the use of data, the choice of lens, and the lack of ownership and agency bestowed to the participant in evaluative reporting. For a programme that seeks to allow young people opportunity to re-engage with learning and making positive choices, I advocate for ownership over their pathways, especially when these pathways are explicitly designed by the participant without assistance from Lyric. Indeed, the narrative of this outcome changes when presented through plurality. What agency and power in making the choice to continue with education is placed with the participant? What was Lyric's contribution towards this outcome? For three of the participants, interview data revealed little connection to participation on START and further educational choices. For one participant, they noted a Young Lyric theatre practitioner (on a previous project) had inspired and encouraged them to express themselves in more creative ways and consider more creative GCSEs. This critique does not apply to Lyric's reporting alone and is endemic of the need to reimagine how impact is demonstrated.

I suggest that in deconstructing the actual narratives presented by participants and understanding motivations, START and other participatory arts programmes can attribute how they assisted in this journey, rather than claiming ownership of it. There are, of course, instances where there is direct causation between participation and pathway, such as Angela's journey. Angela was interested in pursuing acting training and was given a bursary place on Arts Ed's Foundation Acting course, or for a 2022 START participant who successfully moved onto SPRINGBOARD and has thrived in this training environment.

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<sup>29</sup> Participants must be NEET to enrol on START. The Young Lyric Team made an exception for this young person as the benefit of continued engagement with Lyric was agreed by the Pupil Referral Unit and young person.

## Utilising research to improve practice

The aims of the research that I established did not always align with the perceived aims of having a PhD Researcher at Lyric. As highlighted in previous chapters, research and evaluation can be off-putting to many people, not only to participants. Reflection and reflexive practice provide an open and honest way for participants, practitioners, and the START team to engage in meaningful conversations about their experiences and assist in defining change from individual and collective vantages. Some of the START practitioners welcomed me into the space, wherein I made strong connections with participants, and gained valuable insight on how practitioners were working with the young people and including their voice. Many of these workshops were the ones where interesting reflective questions were asked of the participants by the practitioners. Other START practitioners saw me as an intrusion to their space and that of the participants, suggesting I only attend specific sessions where participants were not sharing personal experiences, or made to feel vulnerable due to my presence. I respected their concern for the participants and carefully considered where I might be seen as an intrusion and where I would be welcome. Unsurprisingly, the projects where I was welcomed into the space produced more depth of reflection from participants to those where I had less contact. Participants on some projects talked about reflective practice within the workshop space through discussions and plenaries, while others did not have the same experience.

Through review of START reporting to funders, it appears there was a good level of reflexivity present within the START team, with reports suggesting review of participants' baseline questionnaires, outlining goals and aspirations, and then tailoring the project content for the group. Across the research period of 2018-2022, such reflexivity did not always align to what I had read in reports. Project planning often appeared haphazard, with post-workshop discussions focused on mitigating negative behaviours rather than engaging participants in discussion connected to such behaviours, development of skills, and stretching participants to work at the fringes of their comfort zone. The START team engaged in a reflexive practice, completing a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) at the end of each session, with the intention that it would assist the next day's plans. Through observation of a few SWOT sessions, I considered the model too prescriptive. It seemed to hold the team back from the reflexive element of moving the project forward in the best interest of participants, as they became fixated on deficit areas without considering how to develop these into constructive actions, rehashing the same points in multiple meetings. Through discussion with the Director of Young Lyric, I created a new template for these discussions that was more reflexive in its approach. The new approach was piloted in the summer

2021 project. As I was present for many of these sessions, I helped to guide the team conversations. Questions focused on successes of the day, but also teased out more reflexive ways of engaging with the day's challenges:

- What would happen if x changed?
- What could be done differently tomorrow?
- How can we harness [participant]'s energy of today, towards tomorrow's session?
- What are my reflections on the activities and discussions I had control over?
- What might I do differently tomorrow?

Accountability for making changes was put forward in the daily reports. Review of the daily monitoring sheets post-project was helpful as an evaluation tool as it defined what was happening, what needed to change, and how it might happen, rather than the previous forms which tended to look the same day to day as a SWOT. The move towards use of the new reflexive guide was not welcomed by a [START team member] and unsurprisingly, after the summer session that I took part in, the team reverted to SWOT for the next project.

It was important that my research be done in a holistic way and be of value to Lyric throughout the process. I used my observation log and reflexive journaling to help frame conversations with the START team where I was posing questions based on encounters with participants or when providing recommendations. As example, I used this observation to encourage reflexive practice:

Observation	Reflection/Reflexivity
Devji shared a monologue he had written about coming out to his family with the group.	It was really nice to see Devji feel comfortable enough to share with the group. There was some support in the room but the few that laughed brought the mood down and created tension.
A few participants appeared uncomfortable with the content and resorted to laughing and talking.	I was pleased to see [START team members] stop and challenge this behaviour. They provided positive feedback on the structure of the monologue, passion, and some of the acting choices. A few of the more 'friendly' participants also gave positive feedback.
[START team member] told them to be quiet. Devji continued but was noticeably upset that his sharing was not taken on as he had hoped.	I worry that Devji is setting himself up for a tricky situation is he chooses to share this monologue publicly. Is he ready for that? There are mental health struggles that need to be taken into consideration. Did he get a 1:1 with [START team member] after this to make sure he was okay? I can see the value of self-led monologue work and voicing these to an audience. On the flip side, what are the ethical implications of doing so?
[START team members] reminded participants of their code of conduct and to being kind and open to all.	In one participant voicing a personal journey, does this then open up the flood gates for more personal stories of trauma and inquiry? Are the team prepared for this? Also is the team able to facilitate these conversations and work in what appears to be more of a therapeutic way or drama therapy. The lines are beginning to blur.
Devji sat with shoulders back when feedback was provided by the team and friends.	

This project used creative monologue writing as part of the devising process, with the START directors then creating the structure of the piece. Some extracts from participant created monologues were used and others adapted for use in scenes. Following the above session, I spoke with the START team, asking them some of the questions I noted above. I queried use of the monologue in the safe space of the rehearsal room and in front of an unknown audience. The team also had similar views and noted they were encouraging Devji to express himself, but that not every scene, improvisation, or piece of writing needed to explore the same theme. I left the meeting feeling confident that the team would create a moment for Devji's self-expression to resonate in a creative and inclusive way.

When I returned the following week, I found the 'solution' was not what I had expected. The team had decided it was too personal to share on stage and instead decided to re-work parts of the monologue into a song and develop a character based on Devji's creation. This was then to be played by another member of the group. In theory, this could work, validating Devji's contribution and seeing it reflected on stage could be a valuable moment for his own growth. This way of working reminded me of Playback Theatre's methods, although without the permission to move the story away from the 'teller'.<sup>30</sup> The team decided to give this part to Gabriel, one of the participants who had laughed at Devji's initial monologue. Gabriel did not want to play a character that was coming out to his parents and verbalised this often within the sessions I observed. The team persisted with this casting. From my position as an observer, there was a notable difference in behaviour and willingness to contribute to the sessions from Gabriel from this point on, most likely because his voice had been restricted, as he now had to take on a role that he did not want to play. Ultimately, this led to an altercation on the day of their performance, with Gabriel insulting the directors and being removed from the space. Whilst the insults and verbal barrage were not specifically about playing this character, it was most certainly an underlying current.

My initial reflections on this exchange were that strengthened pastoral care and clearer boundaries for monologue creation were needed. At the time it felt like it was a 'one-off' experience, that perhaps the START team wasn't on their best form that day and missed moments. Reviewing my reflections and other data as a culminative piece of research, years on, it became evident that this was not a one-off incident and that the underpinning mechanisms for content generation for a START project is unclear, leaving it up to each director of a given project to create the structure and

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<sup>30</sup> [Playback Theatre](#) originates in the US. Founded by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas, it uses the work of Freire and Moreno as its inspiration. Based on a theme, the audience is invited to share a moment or experience that connects to the theme, which is then 'played back' for them by a group of actors and a Conductor (director). These experiences are then used to spark group discussion on what was witnessed.

underpinning methodology. I respect the autonomy the Young Lyric Team provides its START directors to develop their craft and create a piece of theatre with the participants, but a guiding framework of best practice, based on years of experience, would help shape stronger artistic outcomes that are underpinned by solid pedagogical practice.

#### Further recommendations

In the above section on redistributing power, I put forward both problematics and possibilities of START. Below I put forward further recommendations for Young Lyric to consider based on this collaborative research. These recommendations apply to START, but also more widely to general programming within Lyric's work with young people and are applicable to other participatory arts programmes. Some of these recommendations are in the process of being actioned, as the team either has already taken research feedback onboard or have arrived at the same conclusions. There are, of course, also examples of good practice already happening within Young Lyric and these are highlighted within the recommendations as well.

#### *Artistic excellence and integrity in programming*

Young Lyric has developed a good delivery model, utilising the talents and strengths of freelance theatre directors/practitioners to deliver START and other programming. Young Lyric seeks out practitioners who have ample experience, artistic vision, and a passion in working with underrepresented young people. Indeed, freelancer practitioners need to have both the expertise and experience to work with diverse young people, in order to find ways to harness each individual's unique creative talents and contributions to the project. Young Lyric has tested different models including co-directors and lead/assistant director pairs; both holding merit and providing a valuable experience for practitioners to hone their craft at Lyric. This model should continue, as bringing in professional directors to work with the young people raises aspirations of the group, provides a sense of professionalism and distinct connection to the theatre, and can result in higher-quality content and artistic outputs. It also connects to Lyric's wider aim to nurture talent, not only of the young people taking part in programmes, but also emerging and established creatives working within the wider creative and cultural industries. For the freelance practitioners, obtaining a six-week contract provides a needed income and allows them opportunity to continue with other work.

The Young Lyric team continues to develop the working model of START and how each project responds to a main house production. Although not found in my fieldwork, there is potential for participants developing a deeper connection to Lyric through this way of working. This can be

heightened opportunity to meet the actors and creatives of the production they are responding to. Additionally, many participants highlighted the opportunity to perform in Lyric's Main house and Studio Theatre, as a moment to be proud of and an aspect that set the programme apart from other experiences. It moves the experience of sharing with an audience from that of the classroom, to a professional arena. Lastly, in having opportunity to rehearse in the theatre, participants experience different aspects to theatre, including how sound and lighting play a part in creating the overall atmosphere. There is opportunity to grow this connection through more teachable moments within START, and further signposting to technical theatre pathways, which are currently in development.

#### *Gaining a qualification*

As developed in this case study, START has always included the opportunity to gain a qualification whilst on the project. In most recent years this has been an Arts Award, which is also offered on a few other selected programmes by Young Lyric. For some participants, achieving this qualification is of significance, and contributes to their sense of achievement across the project. Working towards an Arts Award allows participants opportunity to widen their understanding of theatre through a visit to a performance, critique of the performance, sharing of a creative skill with the group, consideration of inspirational creatives they look up to, and reflective writing on their creative experiences. These activities provide tangible evidence of their journey and when delivered well, add to their overall experience on START. As noted in this case study, during my research the Arts Award sessions often sat separate to the START journey, as an added activity and was not always well delivered. Further embedding of Arts Award sessions and attention to how the sessions are delivered will add to the participants' journey.

#### *Accountability- Ensuring success of the team*

The Young Lyric Team must have the knowledge, skills, and desire to fulfil their roles. Whilst training opportunities are provided by Lyric, more nuanced training to work with marginalised young people will provide stronger care for participants. Where gaps in the knowledge or skills are found, training must be provided in a timely manner. It is important to then ensure new skills are being applied, rather than reverting to old habits. Many of the issues that arose during the research period including ethical issues surrounding safeguarding of participants; breakdowns in communication between staff members; and disorganisation in delivery and follow-up with participants were linked to gaps in knowledge and lack of clear management structures. These gaps ranged from inadequate fundamental skills such as project management and IT literacy, to knowledge of collaborative approaches to working, and inexperience in escalating safeguarding concerns. In other instances,

what was observed was a lack of desire to complete roles in the way that Lyric wanted them completed, instead fulfilling personal agendas. Ensuring accountability across all facets of the work is needed, especially as participants are encouraged to be accountable for their own actions.

#### *Holistic working with the Young Lyric team*

The Young Lyric Team considers the well-being and experience of its participants as it develops programmes. I suggest development of an enhanced, holistic way of working with the Young Lyric Team and freelance practitioners. For the freelance practitioners, the inclusion of an induction to the building, review of safeguarding procedures, making training available to them (safeguarding, first aid, mental health and managing behaviours), and regular check-ins, will ensure a more cohesive way of working and expectations placed upon them as contracted artists. Finding ways to address the well-being of freelance staff is also needed. In a recent journal article, Belfiore discusses the ethics of care for those working in socially engaged arts practice and questions, 'Whose burden should project participants' care really be?' (2022, p. 73). Indeed, I queried this within the structure of START, with some sessions being difficult to navigate and the stories participants shared weighing heavily on staff. Furthermore, the management of difficult behaviours and safeguarding disclosures can be emotionally draining for everyone working on the project. To meet the needs of the participants, the needs of the practitioners must also be acknowledged.

Lyric provides a good ratio of creative and pastoral staff for START. In the model observed the creatives (lead/assistant directors, or co-directors) focused on the content generation and creative way of working; and the pastoral staff shouldered the responsibility for participants' pastoral needs and planning post-project pathways. Whilst the model works, it creates a binary between the creative and pastoral aspects of the project, further exacerbating positions of power. In keeping with Young Lyric's new strategy and desire to focus more on participants' creative development and soft skills whilst on START, rather than development of employment skills and identifying negative behaviours that prevent participants from achieving their goals, now is the time to consider a reimagined approach to delivery of START and how the team operates. Young Lyric tested out a new way of working with underrepresented participants on its community production, *Heart of Hammersmith*, employing what it referred to as 'creative enablers'. The creative enablers provided pastoral care for participants but also provided pedagogical underpinning and interest in applied theatre work. Although only piloted on one project, reflections from the production's writer and creator, and the Director of Young Lyric, noted a creative and nurturing way of working with participants. I suggest that in placing power with the participants to develop their own trajectory through the experience, supported by practitioners who have both the pastoral and creative skills to

aid their journeys, the process is more deeply rooted within creative expression. This reflects current discussions of care aesthetics within socially engaged arts practice. Thompson argues that there is need to consider how the making of art can be an act of care, and that ‘through the process of working with people, materials, and places, care happens: as a game is played or as we rehearse and stage a performance, care takes place’ (2022, p. 1). He extends this, suggesting that caring, ‘in formal health and social care settings, or informally in our daily lives, can be an aesthetic practice: that is, it has a certain craft and involves the creation of sensory, embodied experiences’ (p. 1). This blurring of creativity and care can be witnessed within START. Therefore, adoption of a new model that moves toward a more holistic way of working as a START team; considering care aesthetics through an applied theatre methodology, wherein the full team works from a place of artistic excellence and needed pastoral skills would be advantageous.

When the needs of the wider team are met, it is then easier to engage in collaborative discussions on project planning. I suggest establishing a requirement for the freelance START team to attend 1-2 planning sessions and submit a scheme of work for the 6-weeks to ensure a cohesive project that responds to the main house production. A clear plan can also assist in carving out ample time for participants to spend working on their Arts Award, visiting a theatre production, and arranging additional activities. Sharing a version of this plan with participants would also be advantageous as it provides a tangible plan and visual reference. For many participants, this is their first experience of creating a performance, and seeing a structure can alleviate anxiety of not knowing what is happening next. It also would provide a visual reference which can be helpful for neurotypical young people.

#### *Strengthened well-rounded care and support for participants*

Creating a more well-rounded support system for participants when taking part in START will assist in the building of the key skills each young person aims to develop. I recommend providing START participants with a clearer introduction to the START programme, the building, and wider Lyric team. This begins with strengthened relationships with referral partners to ensure participants are given comprehensive information on the programme. Participants should feel welcome in the building, and this begins by knowing the people in it. Waving hello to the box office team or feeling confident in asking for a drink of water at the bar, can be an indicator of improved confidence for a young person and helps to create a sense of belonging. Additionally, the introduction of different staff members enables participants to deepen their understanding of how a theatre works and the varied



roles that are a part of the industry. This is a foundational, yet key lesson for participants who are interested in being a part of theatre but have limited knowledge of roles within the theatre.

Whilst Young Lyric suggests it adapts to changes and emergent issues within START, there is much further work to be done. The team is sympathetic in its approaches to working with young people in theory, yet in application these ideas are not always fully formed. For example, considerable time is spent discussing how to meet the needs of young people with complex behavioural and emotional needs, yet training and implementation of new systems to meet these needs are not always put into practice, nor is reflexive discussion on what is working made a priority. Within the workshop space there also must be a more well-rounded approach to care, ensuring that all participants feel well supported, not just a selected few. This includes holding participants, freelance and permanent staff accountable for their actions in the space, using the same rules (developed by the group) for everyone.

Importantly, further transparency about post-project pathways needs to be addressed with participants so they fully understand what to expect. Participants should not drift away because of Lyric's doing, rather making it their own choice to move away from Lyric. By making clear arrangements for post-project pathway planning whilst still on the project, followed-up with a phone call/text, the Young Lyric Team can lead by example. In the post-project pathway meeting, it is also important that participants understand what the next steps will be and agree to actions. Accountability is key and the Young Lyric Team should be presenting the change they expect to see in participants.

#### *Continued travel and subsistence subsidy*

Travel: The research suggests travel plays a large part in the young people's developmental journey when taking part on START and may be applicable to other projects. START provides travel card allowance to ensure cost of travel isn't a barrier. Young Lyric's model works well: topping-up Oyster Cards weekly and engaging in conversation with participants to ensure their journeys are fully covered. There are other barriers to travel that can be overlooked by the team or are not voiced by participants during the referral process. Some young people face barriers in accessing services and opportunities because of a lack of confidence in navigating transport and the accompanying barrage of emotions one can face whilst travelling on public transport. Others still, although less prominent in the recent cohorts, face barriers of transport, with reticence to move between postcodes due to gang involvement. Through further dialogue at the recruitment stage, such issues can be addressed.

Subsistence: START provides participants with a hot meal each day. This consistent offer allows participants the security of knowing they will be fed whilst at Lyric and should continue. It may be helpful to consider a selection of snacks and fruit to also be offered within the workshop space to ensure those that arrived without eating breakfast, have something to tide them over until lunch, and for those that will be leaving for the day, to take something away with them if needed.

#### *Meaningful dialogue with young people across all programmes*

I maintain there is need to genuinely listen to young people who have taken part in Lyric's programmes, across all projects and participants, not a selected few. In 2020, work was done to understand how young people wanted to engage with Lyric, and subsequently, a Young Lyric Associate programme was developed. During the pilot year, the Associates met monthly and advised Lyric on a variety of areas across the whole organisation, not just within the Young Lyric work. The associates were selected following an expression of interest and interview with Young Lyric staff. This platform proved helpful in gaining further insight on what young people would like to see happen within the theatre, but is inherently driven by young creatives, who are of course looking to develop their own craft, and as such, view the suggested opportunities through their own lens. Representation was addressed through the pilot cohort (in gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation). One participant on the initial board came via the START programme and continues to engage in some capacity. In future iterations it is important to also consider representation in other areas, providing voice for underrepresented young people due to disability, experience of the care system, experience of the criminal justice system, experience with homelessness, etc. It is integral that the Young Lyric Associates are heard but also that the voices of wider Young Lyric participants are acknowledged. This can be achieved by informal conversations, focus groups, surveys, and other methods. It is also recommended that an alternative experience for discussion on the direction of START is provided with past participants to feedback on content and delivery. Lastly, discussion with young people about how agency and ownership is reflected in all aspects of Young Lyric programming would be advantageous.

#### *Building and strengthening pathways of START*

As developed within this case study, pathways for young people on completion of START needs further consideration. Such considerations are three-fold: ensuring participants understand what opportunities the Young Lyric team will assist them in accessing; providing a range of opportunities at Lyric; and developing a stronger referral network with likeminded creative organisations. This recommendation is already in development, with Young Lyric putting further opportunities in place

for 2022. The SPRINGBOARD programme provides a platform for talented young artists to develop their craft outside of the traditional drama school setting. The pilot saw three young people who took part on START projects between 2017 and 2021, secure places on the two-year programme. This model is one pathway for past START participants to build skills to enter the industry and is a large commitment for a young person. Therefore, the opportunity is not for everyone who completes START, and statistically, there is less than a 33% chance that a START participant will be selected for SPRINGBOARD. START graduates interested in pursuing further acting classes now also have opportunity to join a weekly class. Young Lyric already has a good working relationship with in-house partners (noted on page 63) and can provide bursary places for young people interested in taking on opportunities with these organisations. This provides young people with both a new opportunity but also continued engagement at Lyric, a place where they feel welcomed and safe. There are numerous organisations that run complementary creative programmes such as WAC Arts, National Youth Theatre, The Old Vic, Young Vic, and the Royal Court, dependent on a participant's interests. Developing stronger relationships with these organisations would assist in making referrals for further programmes, still within START's revised remit to encourage further creative engagement post-project.

#### *Utilisation of creative and inspiring spaces*

One of the more illuminating findings from the research was the intensive investment in planning and testing out ways of working ahead of the capital redevelopment. This determination to secure funds and deliver the Reuben Foundation Wing dominated Lyric for nearly a decade. The resulting output of a dedicated place for rehearsals and classes to be held was an impressive achievement. From this review, it is evident that these new spaces were well used for creative exploration across 2015/16-2017/18. During one of my first interviews with a young person at Lyric, I was told many stories about the exciting and innovative projects they took part in during this time including a promenade piece where they welcomed people to the Reuben Foundation Wing. The participant reflected, 'We used all the rooms, even the staircase!'. I note this, as my observations during the research period have not always been of joy and creative use of spaces. Rather, more of a focus on event hire in the larger spaces, which is needed to produce income, and smaller spaces remaining empty during the day. Moreover, specialist spaces such as the cinema and sensory space seem to only have been used a handful of times for their intended purpose. Projects including START and REWIND, working with the most vulnerable of young people engaging with Lyric are relegated to an unloved mezzanine space with low ceilings, set away from the rest of the building. This is of course,

in my limited experience of being in the building, but I would suggest as Lyric moves forward in its strategy, a renewed excitement towards these spaces is needed.

#### *Participant numbers and reporting*

Throughout the annual reports, funding applications and other literature, Lyric uses varying ways of highlighting who uses the space, for what purpose, and for what length of time. As noted earlier, use of 'total participants', 'total number of opportunities' and 'attendances' all have featured within reporting. Whilst it is common practice to use the highest number to demonstrate overall reach of programming, what does 'there were 33,000 attendances by young people' really mean? If deconstructed this number starts to tell stories of who attended and why. I suggest a more transparent and meaningful way of delivering this information; noting the number of young people who attended performances of the winter pantomime with their schools is important, but the impact of that visit is entirely different to a young person who attended 24 full-day sessions on START and subsequently enrolls in a weekly acting class. A visual of varying attendances would paint a more holistic and insightful picture.

#### *Past participant pathways and employment*

A further finding through this review is the numerous creative and employment pathways that were available to young people at Lyric and through partners from 2005-2016. The number of young people having access to work experience and employment opportunities was impressive, yet untenable, especially within the current climate with reduced resources, yet there is much to learn from re-examining these opportunities. As Lyric enters year two of its SPRINGBOARD programme, and considers what further engagement might look like with Lyric, what can be learned from past experience? Furthermore, as planning continues for a vision of seamless pathways for young people to take part in opportunities at Lyric, a planning document developed through consultation with young people, would provide a meaningful way of addressing what is achievable, and help to manage expectations. As highlighted in feedback from START participants and observations, there are differing expectations of what 'might' happen next and pathways that young people can follow. This is often down to the relationships they make with Lyric staff and are dependent on that person staying in post. Through a cohesive and collective review of what is available and what is not, a transparent explanation can be given. For example: previously, young people taking part on START might be given the opportunity to shadow as an usher and then be employed in a front of house role. As such opportunities are no longer provided, START team members need to understand the new working model and provide clear signposting as to how to apply for an ushering role, separate from the Young Lyric department.

### *Embracing cross-fertilisation, signposting for young people*

With Greater London on the doorstep, there are numerous opportunities for young people to get involved within the creative and cultural sector. Many arts organisations maintain contact with participants through bi-weekly round-up emails, Instagram or What's App groups. The benefits for Lyric are three-fold: it provides Lyric with some contact with past participants and the ability to encourage them back into the building when there is something appropriate for them to do; it allows for greater depth of knowledge of participant pathways and impacts, as they are more likely to stay in touch; and it provides a helpful space for young people to find new opportunities. Young people are more apt to take up an opportunity with another organisation if it is validated by someone they know as being of good quality. Additionally, rather than work in isolation and attempting to 'keep' young people attending, I suggest encouraging young people to go off, try new things and return to Lyric, when possible, as this provides a more holistic approach to building up the creative and cultural skill set of young people, effectively building their cultural capital.

### *Young Lyric structure*

As developed in Chapter 5, there was a significant shift in Young Lyric team structure and turnover of staff during the time of my research. Indeed, of the seven Young Lyric staff members in October 2018, only one remains in post as of January 2023, with most departing in 2019. The current team (March 2023) is the equivalent of 4.5 full-time members of staff. High staff turnover in arts organisations is to be expected, yet the frenetic pace and disconnect from communal goals and strategy that I observed during the early phase of research suggests a breakdown in communication and leadership coincided with these events. More positively, the current team has been in post for a good length of time and are taking on the challenge of delivering new programming post-Covid with renewed energy and focus. When reviewing current staffing against previous years within the Young Lyric department, there has been a downward trend in the number of full-time equivalent staff. This must be recognised when analysing number of participants reached and the breadth of programming delivered.

### *Young Lyric funding*

Following a similar downward trend, the total expenditure for Young Lyric activities and support costs has declined annually since 2015/16 and the opening of the Reuben Foundation Wing (see Figure 6). Whilst this is most certainly expected during 2020/21 with closure of the theatre, the steady decline in expenditure prior to this year provides an interesting picture. This decrease in expenditure is most likely connected to a decrease in funding secured towards programming with

children and young people. Whilst the public funds that supported Young Lyric from 2005-2010 are no longer available, continued diversification of Lyric's funding portfolio towards Young Lyric's work is needed.

#### YOUNG LYRIC TOTAL EXPENDITURE ON ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN AND SUPPORT COSTS

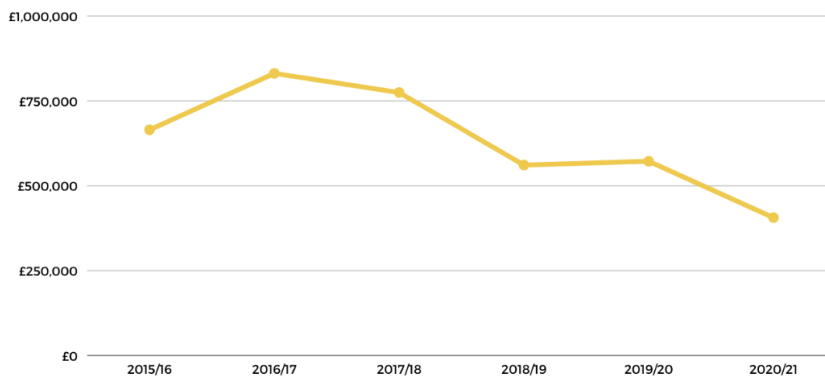


Figure 6

From a review of funding applications for Young Lyric's work, I noticed a disconnect between the remit of the fund, what Lyric applies for, and what is delivered. At times, Lyric appears to be 'chasing' funds, reframing projects to fit criteria that does not naturally fall into the shape of Lyric's programmes, or overstating intended outcomes which are difficult to achieve. Regardless, this puts undue pressure on the Young Lyric team to deliver projects that have not been well conceived.

Through my analysis of funding proposals for Young Lyric, I have already recommended refinement of Young Lyric's objectives and expected outcomes. Collectively, the Young Lyric team and I worked to develop clearer outcomes that befitted the current delivery of projects. This proved difficult as when we discussed what a given project actually achieved, the team concluded that some programming was not delivering against existing outcomes and that these outcomes be removed. This caused tensions as certain projects then appeared less 'fundable' as they were not delivering 'transformational' results. For example, a project working with young people at risk of becoming NEET historically used an outcome of 'improving attendance at school'. As a team we considered how this was being evaluated: what data was suggesting that this change had happened; and how Lyric could claim its intervention was the direct cause of improved attendance. Through discussion, we concluded that this is no longer a reasonable outcome for the project, as mechanisms for capturing this change sit outside the remit of the project. This was of course a concern, as a funder may find an uplift in the number of young people in school as an attractive output. I advised Lyric be bold, honest, and accountable for what Lyric and the project can reasonably achieve in 10 sessions

of 3 hours, rather than suggesting outcomes that are not supported by the project's delivery model, nor can be truly captured in post-project evaluation.

### *Young Lyric strategic planning*

It is paramount that Young Lyric's strategy continues to be nurtured, responsive to Lyric's business plan and reflective of its NPO status as an organisation delivering high-quality creative opportunities for young people. The department has seen times of great creativity and growth and times where it seems to have lost its way. One former Young Lyric Team Member noted that there were times that were 'intense' with 'far too much on everyone's plate' and 'no days off', but that the 'atmosphere was amazing', the young people 'were so involved in the projects' and the 'quality of the work was present'. This reflected a diverse portfolio of projects, some high-quality projects and others that merely filled a needed gap. This is noted in my reflective journal, 'The vision for the department seems confused and disparate. All three producers are running around nonstop working in a siloed approach. There is hardly any communication or support between them' (Journal entry 15/01/2019). The reformation of a streamlined Young Lyric Strategy, produced by the Director of Young Lyric, aims to address these areas, and to ensure programming is responsive to the work on Lyric's stages, inspired by West London and its communities, and is reflective of Lyric's mission.

I acknowledge digesting research findings and reviewing recommendations takes time and the active engagement of the Young Lyric team. Not all of the recommendations provided here will be actioned, but this critical case study puts forward ideas to consider, suggests new ways of working, and embedding youth voice within programming; not out of necessity, but a desire to reflect and respect plurality of perspective and lived experience of Lyric's young people.

I end this critical case study by reflecting on Lyric's mission statement:

We are the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre. We are the civic and creative heart of West London. We believe that everyone deserves to experience the life changing impact of theatre.

In our big, beautiful theatre, we tell stories that matter and work with exceptional talent to make ambitious, entertaining, inspiring shows for our audience in West London and beyond.

We remove barriers to engagement and ensure young people have the opportunity to discover the power of their creativity, shaping the future of British theatre.

We are inclusive, forward looking and unafraid of change – we are proud of our history and ambitious for our future.

A local theatre with a national impact: The Lyric – 125 years young.  
(Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, 2022b)

This case study is written in good faith and as a critical friend to Lyric. The entanglements and complexities I interrogate throughout this case study can be collaboratively addressed by Lyric, harnessing its desire to be inclusive, to look forward, and approach change unafraid. In welcoming collaborative PhD research into the Lyric, they have demonstrated openness to examining their current practices and a willingness to reflect on past programming, with an aim to positively influence future programming. There was considerable change for Lyric over the research period as highlighted in this case study: from staff changes across the whole organisation, the theatre's closure due to Covid-19, staff being furloughed, and a revised artistic vision for the theatre. These events impacted how Young Lyric interacted with participants and what programmes were available. Post-pandemic, there continues to be change for Lyric as an organisation and within the creative and cultural sector. Importantly, the ever-changing needs of young people must be considered. Lyric has made positive steps towards implementing social change as an organisation and continues to do so, as reflected in a strengthened Young Lyric strategy and a dedicated post of an Outreach Officer added in 2022, to ensure more cohesive care for young people. The team has also engaged in more strategic and reflective discussions, moving away from siloed approaches to project management.

As this piece of research concludes, I encourage Lyric and other organisations delivering participatory arts programmes to consider further engagement with external researchers and evaluators, to enrich its knowledge base of *how* and *why* its programming *with* and *for* young people effects change on the individual and organisational level. The findings and recommendations developed within this chapter are of importance to Lyric as they develop specific actions to implement. Looking more broadly to the creative and cultural sector, this case study's interrogation of practice, planning and evaluation holds important learnings and recommendations that can be applied when working with underrepresented people through the arts.



## Part 3: Conclusions

Part 3 concludes this thesis, responding to the existing knowledge base explored in Part 1, and critical case study put forward in Part 2, with the development of a re-imagined approach to explore and analyse the impact of participatory arts. Chapter 9 moves away from specific discussion of Lyric's START programme, to address the wider need and implications of evaluation from a place of hope and compassion for participants. Through use of this conceptual framework, I suggest more meaningful engagement in the evaluation process can be achieved with participants and other stakeholders to define social impact from pluralistic perspectives.

## Chapter 9: Towards a hopeful and compassionate approach to participatory arts evaluation

The problem is not with evaluation, which is integral to all creative work, but how, by whom and why it is done. The long and costly effort to prove art's social, economic and intrinsic value is entangled in a political culture concerned with control, not with knowledge, or the wisdom of experience.

(Matarasso, 2019, p. 163)

Throughout this thesis I have explored the *how*, the *by whom*, and *why* evaluation of participatory arts programmes is undertaken. As Matarasso highlights, the politics of evaluation are entangled with the need to prove the efficacy of participatory arts programmes. I contend that in moving the goal of evaluation from *proving* value, towards the generation of learning, new knowledge, and exchange, we can better reflect the diversity of participation and personal schemas brought to the engagement. This growing knowledge base will still highlight efficacy, whilst also creating a robust and meaningful evidence base of impact that can be shared and used as a living document for organisations and individuals to reflect on change. In this final chapter, I move from the exploration of the current knowledge base developed in Part 1, and critical case study put forward in Part 2, towards the possibilities of holistic participatory arts evaluation developed *with* and *for* participants. Within this chapter, I advocate for imbuing evaluative data with narratives derived from the multiple truths that are developed through the evaluative process, from both participant and organisational understanding; encourage reflexivity in the evaluative process; put forward a conceptual evaluation framework to rebalance power; and promote need for a cultural shift in how we conceive evaluation, before concluding.

Throughout this thesis I have established that there are burdensome requirements placed on practitioners and organisations to meet the needs of funders. Meeting these requirements can create a blinkered approach to data collection, with sole focus on achieving targets. My contention is – whilst the simplification of evaluation through such data driven outputs results in examples of advocacy for programmes –it leaves little room for deepening understanding of *what* occurred and *how* this has impacted those taking part. This is not a new concern, with Belfiore and Bennett (2010), Freebody et al (2018)), Matarasso (2019) and others highlighting such issues over the past twenty years. Their collective research considers the over-saturation of participatory arts evaluation reports which produce repetitive findings. What is the true benefit of yet another report confirming that participants enjoyed themselves, gained new skills, and would like to take part again? Such reports validate what is already known and does little more than provide assurance to a funder that a project took place. Furthermore, funders' desires to 'reach the right people' through their funding

has led to the over-saturation of requirements to report on the protected characteristics of participants, leading to intrusive requests of personal data. There is need to align the 'ask' of participants to the content, aims, length and depth of the given programme. How much data is required for a young person to give when attending a half-day taster session, a week-long project, or a year-long programme? Similarly, from a participant perspective, why must an organisation capture their sexuality or religion when they have only agreed to attend a one-day poetry workshop exploring climate change or take part in a mural painting project bringing storybooks to life?

In Chapter 2, I highlighted changes to evaluation processes through exploration of different frameworks. Many of these attempted to ease the process of evaluation, or to make it more manageable. This resulted in many funding bodies developing their own reporting forms or portals, where practitioners and organisations report back on specific criteria that is important to the funder. This allows the funder to then create datasets and an overall snapshot of their impact, yet it does little for the funded organisation in thinking about the experience of participation or their own project outcomes and strategic aims. Such data also is of little value to participants, who most often are not even aware of where their data will be used, past explanation of needing to report back to a funder. Organisations delivering participatory arts work will most likely receive funding from multiple sources, and if each has its own reporting mechanism and data that needs to be collected, this creates difficulty in capturing data to 'fit' each funder's criteria. With constraints on personnel and resource, once this data is collected, many organisations are not in a position to analyse the data collected past what is required by a funder; or to use creative methods to work alongside participants to evaluate their experience and truly understand individual and collective impacts. Raw and Robson suggest that evaluating participatory work can be 'the most taxing and anxiety-inducing aspects of delivering arts projects with communities' (2017, p. 123), thus placing further restrictions and pressures on creative arts practitioners and arts organisations. Such views are elaborated by Belfiore (2022), who highlights the unseen costs to creative arts practitioners who work within publicly funded programmes. Although not fully explored in this thesis, such problematics need addressing from an organisational perspective, wherein the freelance practitioners are required to give beyond their contracted hours to ensure robust evaluation is completed.

There is movement towards embedding strengthen models of evaluation within the creative and cultural sector. In the past year alone, I have noticed more job advertisements from creative organisations, especially NPOs, for in-house roles of Insight and Impact Manager (or similar). The creation of a specific role to take on the evaluation and impact insights of programming will lessen

the burden on the creative practitioners delivering the work with participants and ensure differing evaluation data requirements expected by funders are met. On one hand this can be seen as a welcomed addition, ensuring robust data collection and collation; worryingly, it points towards further metrics and simplification of data to create an evidence base that is delivered through a funder and organisational lens. I acknowledge that there are benefits of metrics and creating a wider evidence base, but also champion the value of listening and investing in a holistic evaluation process that places participants' experience and reflections at its core. Moreover, as I consider holistic and participant-centric ways of evaluating participatory arts programmes, I return to the same question: how can organisations and practitioners effectively explore both the instrumental and intrinsic value of the participatory arts experience? I argue that by inviting reflexivity into the evaluation process, supported by more creative approaches to data generation, analysis and dissemination, the intrinsic value of the experience can be foregrounded.

#### *Encouraging reflexivity in participatory arts evaluation*

Whilst reflexivity is often discussed in connection to research, pedagogy, and arts practice, there is sparse writing on the use of reflexivity and reflection<sup>31</sup> in evaluation and guidance on how best to apply reflexivity in the creation of culturally competent evaluations. Van Draanen asserts the ability to understand evaluator positionality can 'cultivate a heightened sensitivity towards the way some evaluations reinforce marginalization and exclusion and perpetuate the societal inequity that stems from inequality of power' (2017, p. 373). The use of reflexive practice in evaluation can 'heighten awareness of personal biases and political context and invoke opportunities to challenge the unintended influences of personal biases on evaluation practice' (p. 373). Through reflexive practice in evaluation and the consideration of biases and political contexts, I suggest a stronger and more honest evaluation of programming can occur.

Taylor suggests, '[e]valuators, like good reflective practitioners, can remove the stifling shackles of expertise when writing reports and revise conventional understandings of authority. They can interrogate the truths they confront daily and imagine what is possible in the field, what is not possible, and what might be' (2003, p. 132). It is the interrogation of truths that makes the evaluation of participatory arts programmes difficult to pin down or package in a singular narrative. Complementing Taylor's suggestions, Gilbert and Slied argue that reflexivity is a critical component of social action and as such needs to move beyond *self*-reflexivity of the individual towards 'joint

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<sup>31</sup> The terms reflexive and reflective are defined in Chapter 3. The terms are often used interchangeably by practitioners.

deconstruction of power in the voices and relationships operating between stakeholders', naming this *inter-relational reflexivity* (2009, p. 469). They suggest '*inter-relational reflexivity* includes a concern for moral agency and involves a negotiation of accountability and reflexivity for action' (p. 469). Through inter-relational reflexivity, there can be acknowledgement of the complexities of participant experience, practitioner and organisational agendas, changing socio-political factors, and discussion of new insights. Furthermore, an inter-relational reflexive approach assumes that an organisation will grow and change; and I would add, so do its participants. Inviting inter-relational reflexivity into evaluation allows for dynamic engagement with data.

As explored throughout this thesis, in shifting the lens by which evaluation is approached, researchers and evaluators can develop an understanding of a given phenomenon but also 'disrupt imbalances of power, social injustices, marginalization, and oppression perpetrated through traditional meaning-making' (Rogers, 2012, p. 8). Furthermore, by inviting plurality of voice, through multiple knowledges and holistic exploration of an activity, programme or experience, I assert more meaningful understanding of experience and change can occur across numerous stakeholders.

#### Evaluating from a place of with-ness, friendship, and hope

To rebalance power and provide a cultural shift in evaluation of participatory arts programmes, I suggest it is approached with a willingness to learn, the ability to invite openness, and an interest in placing value on both the individual and collective experience. In this section, I put forward a conceptual approach to evaluating participatory arts programmes that employs key tenets of with-ness, friendship, and hope (see Figure 7).

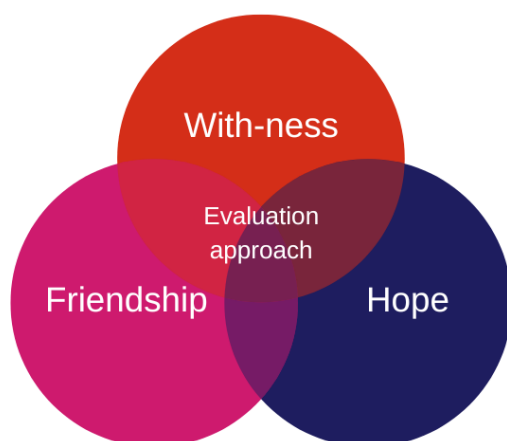


Figure 7

This new conceptual approach moves evaluation away from a bureaucratic necessity, instead inviting a more active and enjoyable exchange of perspectives. The tenets applied at first glance may

seem odd: the use of 'friendship' within research and evaluation, for example is not often applied. The very nature of an evaluation process engaging with underrepresented participants, needs friendship for the participants, the right to be treated with care and an openness to allowing participants to speak freely, in their own time and space. The tenets of with-ness, friendship, and hope allow opportunity to invest in individual encounters, reflexively engage with data, and put forward recommendations that are honest and reflect feedback from participants. These tenets can be applied to data gathering methods, analysis, writing of reports, and the dissemination of findings.

Gallagher suggests that through research we make relationships with participants and need to create space for 'suffering even as it may threaten or diminish the aims of the research' (2014, p. 102). She refers to this as approaching the research from a place of *love* as a reflexive researcher, pointing to mid-century feminist writers including Rita Mae Brown, Simone de Beauvoir, and Mary Daly as influential in positioning love as a tool for social change. In application, this allows for *friendship* within research as a pathway towards compassion and ultimately strives for *with-ness* in research, or solidarity with participants. To achieve such a methodology, reflexivity and relational understanding are also needed.

### *With-ness*

Participants should be treated with care and considered as both knowledge holders and activators of change. This disrupts the carefully constructed power structures by inviting shared construction of knowledge through *with-ness*, or multiple ways of knowing, of understanding, and acting upon new knowledge. Through with-ness participants' voices are not only acknowledged but validated through active engagement to bring about the changes they wish to see (Mitra, 2003, p. 289). I draw from Hogg et al.'s definition of with-ness:

an ethical concept imbued with psychological, social, political, and epistemological elements/facets. It is lived experience, enacted in mutuality and reciprocity. With-ness requires collective responsibility to move back and forth as we listen, seek, ponder, engage, reflect and perhaps reengage. With-ness is whole-bodied, and it demands active participation.

(2020, pp. 211-212)

*With-ness* encourages the coming together to evoke change, placing participant voice at its centre. It echoes Freire's concept of critical consciousness by providing space for 'naming the world' (2006).

Shotter considers the experiential nature of with-ness thinking, suggesting:

The interplay involved gives rise, not to a visible seeing, for what is 'sensed' is invisible; it gives rise to an interpretation (to a representation), for our responses occur spontaneously

and directly in our living encounters with an other's expression. Neither is it merely a feeling, for it carries with it as it unfolds a bodily sense of the possibilities for responsive action in relation to one's momentary placement, position, or orientation in the present interaction. Instead, it gives rise to a *shaped* and *vectored* sense of our moment-by-moment changing involvement with our current surroundings – engendering in us both unique anticipations as to what-next might happen, along with, so to speak, 'action guiding advisories' as to what-next we might expect *in relation to* the actions we might take. In short, we can be spontaneously 'moved' towards specific possibilities for action in such thinking. (2006, p. 600)

Hogg et al. suggest through with-ness an approach emerges that places respect and awareness to participants as individuals, resulting in the cultivation of 'authentic relationships' (2020, p. 212). This knowledge is formed *from within* the system, rather than *from the outside*. The application of with-ness allows participants to bring the 'unfinished' ideas to the table without need for guilt or fear, and 'power is redistributed as we recognize multiple sources of knowledge' (p. 213), placing respect and expertise amongst all those taking part in a co-generative fashion. The application of with-ness to an evaluation framework acknowledges the current socioeconomic and political landscape, allowing for dialogue between young people and organisations on how they navigate a rapidly changing world. In turn, participant experience moves from being passive within the evaluative process, to dialogue of liberation (Giroux, 1997).

#### Example of evaluating from a place of with-ness

One cohort of START participants worked particularly well as a group and I wanted to draw upon the relationships they created. For this exploration, we worked collectively to map out feelings they connected to their experience on START. They then created montages of still images (physical representations of emotions, feelings and events) to tell the story of their journeys as a collective (see Figure 8). The participants listened and responded to each other's ideas, refining the image, and adding to it until they were all happy with what it represented. The images were powerful and gave voice to moments the participants had not expressed in feedback sessions before. Through a shared vision of *we*, rather than *I*, a more cohesive collective response on impact was found. This added value to the individual interviews and discussions I had with participants, being able to refer back to a collective moment. As example - one group started with the concept of *energy*, explaining that the energy brought into the space by the START team and participants was exciting and made them want to return. This made the space *fun* and through having *fun* they were able to learn new things and build *confidence*. In the development of their montages, they sat with *confidence* for a long time and decided that ultimately, the experience led them to have more *self-belief* that they could achieve their goals.

As this example demonstrates, when evaluating from a place of with-ness there is a levelling of power, where multiple truths are allowed to sit side by side and an active quality to the shaping of collective and individual reflections. In acceptance of multiple truths, we can allow the expertise, values and knowledges of stakeholders to mingle, inform and generate new knowledge (Hogg et al., 2020, p. 213). Shifting epistemologies, or how we come to know what we know changes from *I*, (as

individual or organisation) to we (with inclusion of participants as knowledge holders), arriving at a more interconnected viewing of experience, with each individual owning their experience and subsequent change.

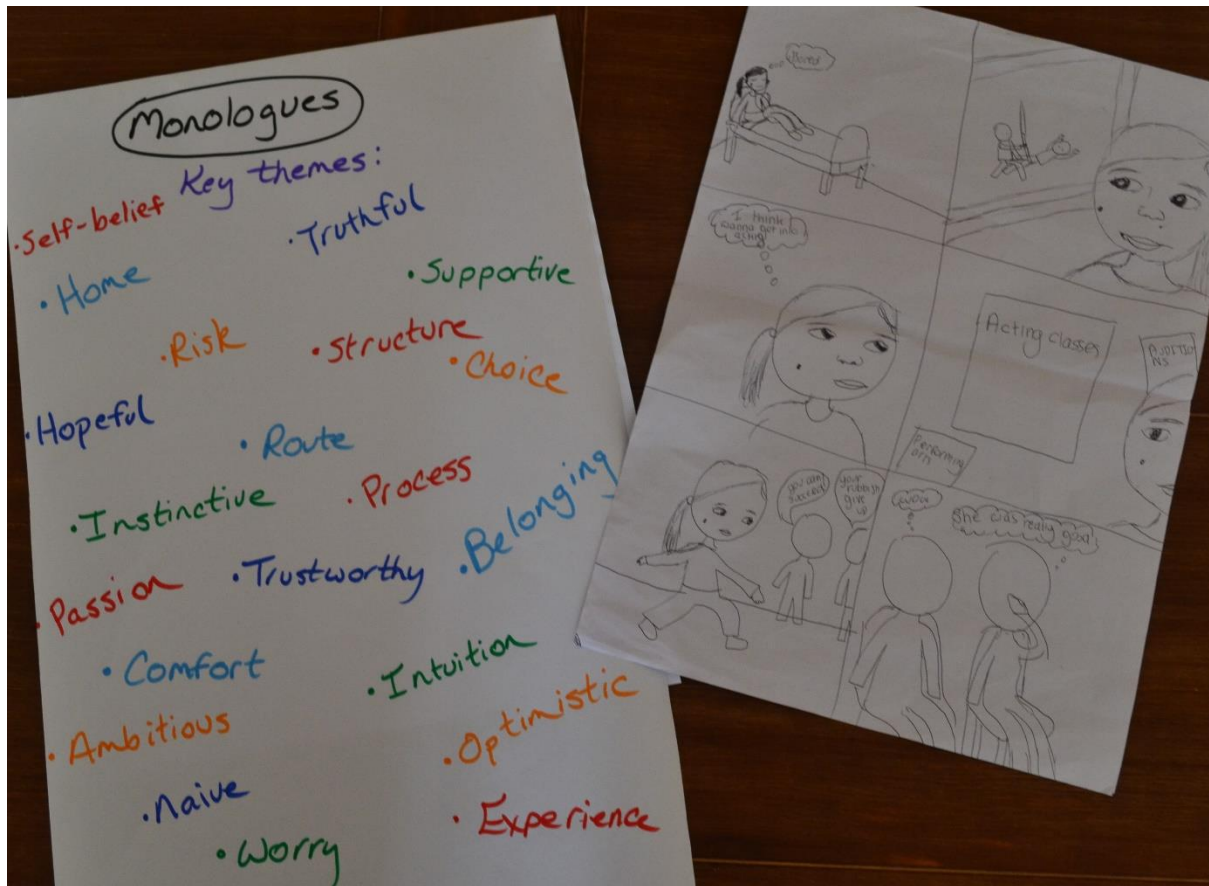


Figure 8

### Friendship

Friendship in evaluation places the participants as unique and individual beings, who are *engaging* in the process of an evaluation. Applying similar attributes to with-ness including working from within, active engagement and seeking authentic relationships, Tillmann (2015) developed a research methodology using *friendship as method*. Tillmann defines friendship as a method as 'neither a program nor a guise strategically aimed at gaining further access. It is a level of investment in participants' lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project' (p. 10). In doing so, researchers consider their participants as readers of their research, writing with honesty and integrity for their audience. Furthermore, she suggests friendship as method 'demands radical reciprocity, a move from studying "them" to studying us' (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 235). By employing friendship to research, strengths, issues, or weaknesses emerge through the natural cycle



of time, as relationships reveal themselves. Each relationship is unique and is defined by the circumstances in which they are formed. Friendship as method also extends beyond the participant/researcher relationship to the dissemination of the research, with Tillman suggesting researchers engage audiences to consider how they can become active and responsible citizens (2015, p. 11).

I contend that inviting friendship into the evaluation process, the focus can shift from validating outcomes, to understanding the experiences in full that brought participants to where they are now. Evaluating from friendship seeks reciprocity, inviting the organisation or practitioner to also reflect inwardly on the experience and its impact, just as it invites participants to do so. The shift in focus from writing *for* a funder, to writing *for* and *with* participants alters the meaning-making of the evaluation and enlivens the discussion. Furthermore, use of friendship within participatory arts evaluation as a method encourages compassionate observation and listening, which can be linked to reflexive evaluation and the tenets of with-ness and hope.

#### **Example of evaluating with friendship**

The young people taking part in Lyric's START programme brought with them lived experiences that I could not relate to, and they were often upfront with me about this. For example, one lunchtime when I was chatting with participants, a few of them started a conversation about universal credit. Ty said, "Miss, you alright but you know nothing about any of this." And it was true, I did not understand the changes to universal credit, housing or leaving care allowances, nor lived experienced that reflected that of the participants. Ty took the time to explain his current situation – how he could take part in this project because it didn't 'mess with his credit' but as he was heading to university in four months' time, he couldn't run the risk of taking on a part-time job or accredited training as it wasn't worth the risk of putting himself in a financially vulnerable position. Application of *friendship as method*, in this instance, afforded me the ability to move from position of evaluator or researcher to friend or witness. This conversation resonated with me as Ty felt it was important for me to understand his position: in his words - he was not 'lazy' or a 'drain' on government funding but was actively trying to 'rise up' but was 'held back by the system'. I left this conversation with a new understanding of this struggle and how power dynamics played out in his life, external to his engagement with the project, yet inextricably linked; he left (hopefully) feeling that his experiences whilst not shared, were witnessed with compassion, were valid, had been heard and helped shape my thinking. Through friendship, this exchange provides valuable insight on some of the choices and reflections Ty shared across the project. For example, from the onset, he would not commit to attending extra sessions, or consider taking part in summer week-long projects, which, at the time I had assumed was due to a lack of interest or feelings of not being welcomed into the space. Had quantitative survey responses alone been used to chart interest in pursuing further projects at Lyric or entry onto training, Ty's neutral or negative response could have been misinterpreted.

As explored in this example, use of friendship as method within evaluation, allows the evaluator to encourage reflectivity across all stakeholders, whilst also placing themselves within the discussion.

The holistic triangulation of data that can be used to support participant perspective additionally expands where friendship is enabled.

### *Hope*

Concepts and theories of hope often appeared in ethnographic research: the quest of defining hope; use of hope in connection to agency and pathways; and the emancipatory power of hope. My initial understanding of hope comes from the critical pedagogy of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and subsequent *Pedagogy of Hope* (2014). Freire places hope as a necessary concept and invites people to seek alternative visions of their own lives and society. He tasks people to challenge their present situations, articulating their worlds, critiquing them, and moving towards critical consciousness, which lends itself to developing social change. Giroux suggests, '[h]ope for Freire is a practice of witnessing, an act of moral imagination that encourages progressive educators to stand at the edge of society, to think beyond existing configurations of power in order to imagine the unthinkable in terms of how they might live with dignity, justice, and freedom' (Giroux, 2000, p. 146). Giroux's theory of hope draws upon Freire's pedagogy of hope and the work of theorist, Gramsci, advocating for the visualisation of a better world. Giroux considers an individual's agency with this theory as '... the condition of struggle, and hope is the prerequisite of all modes of critically engaged agency. Hope expands the space of the possible and becomes a way of recognizing and naming the incomplete nature of the present while providing the foundation for informed action' (Giroux, 2015, p. 80). This powerful use of hope can be a catalyst for change when placed within an educational or participatory project.

Situating hope in a psychological framing, Snyder offers a cognitive theory of hope, positioning hope as 'a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derive sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)' (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 297). Snyder (2000) suggest that goals provide the anchor for the theory, with 'hopeful goals' positioned on a continuum. Those that are fully achievable do not 'necessitate hope', whereas those that have a very small probability of being fulfilled are counterintuitive to discussion. The pathways people take towards reaching their desired goals are supported by 'hopeful thought'. As within Freire and Giroux's use of hope, Snyder asserts that agency is integral to the process, to propel people towards their goals.

**Hope = Agency + Pathways**  
(Snyder, 2000, p. 10)

When applying this to the development of a new conceptual evaluation framework for participatory arts programmes, I set the equation as **Agency + Pathways = Hope**. This application encourages participant agency, the building confidence in taking ownership of experience, and facilitating discussion and movement towards positive pathways, which in turn lead to a more hopeful future. It also provides space and active engagement from the participatory arts provider, suggesting that there is need for agency within the programme and mutually formed pathways for hope to be possible. Whilst a simplistic equation, the application I propose moves pathway building from an activity plan of next steps, towards the planning of realistic goals alongside activity, approached through hope. I locate the principal of hope within participatory arts programming as hope for better collective and individual futures; hope of engaging and thought-provoking experiences within programming; hope of co-generated outputs; and hope of social change. Hope is personal and yet can be collective.

Solnit asserts that hope is not 'the believe that everything was, is, or will be fine... It's also not a sunny everything-is-getting-better narrative, though it may be a counter to everything-is-getting-worse narrative. You could call it an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings' (2016, pp. xi-xii). She furthers this idea of hope as an unknown, yet internal and palpable belief that it must be taken forward.

Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to act. When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes – you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable [...] It's the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand.

(Solnit, 2016, p. xii)

I contend there is need to approach evaluation from a place of hope, with mindful consideration of how participant futures are discussed in a hopeful manner. In evaluating with hope, there is an appreciation of where participants have come from, the journey they have taken on the project, and inclusion of aspirations for their future.

#### **Application of hope in evaluation**

As example, I use discussions I had with Theresa (explored in Chapter 7). Theresa situated her reflections from a place of hope, noting her hope that Lyric would provide her with a safe place to be creative and develop her skills, and presenting ideas of a hopeful future for herself. Although her experience was not as she had hoped it would be, she still desired to move forward with her aim of being a part of theatre in some way. She did not know if it would be onstage, directing,

writing or another role, but she wanted to explore this further. Agency in making these decisions was placed with her. At the time there was a theatre-making programme opening up at the Royal Court Theatre and I suggested she apply. After discussion with her family, we worked together to put forward an application and she was successful in securing a place. This pathway moved her away from the negative experiences she associated with Lyric and onto something new. To my delight, when asked to take part in Lyric's Youth Voice sessions a year later, she agreed, and was able to voice further opinions through this outlet. From an evaluative perspective and via 'proving' impact measures, the immediate impacts of START for Theresa might not be captured fully. She expressed feelings of improved confidence in her ability to perform, widened creative skills, and strengthened communication with her peers. The breakdown in trust with the START team created a barrier to enjoyment, feelings of being heard and the creation of a safe environment. As pathway planning did not occur, continuation onto other opportunities did not happen in the immediate, outside the connection with Royal Court Theatre that I (as a researcher) helped to facilitate.

Applying a hopeful framing that is participant-centric, I was able to witness from the fringes in the longer-term, and allow Theresa to develop her narrative which highlighted subtle changes and determination of a hopeful future. Through application of with-ness, friendship, and hope in the evaluation process, a holistic and ethical approach to evaluation begins to emerge. The analysis of data in this way allows for reflective practice and delivers honest and transparent evidence of experience and subsequent impact.

#### *A hopeful and compassionate approach to evaluation*

I put forward the following framework as a hopeful and compassionate approach to evaluating participatory arts programmes, placing participants as interpreters of the world around them, situating them in the valued position of changemakers within their own lives. Importantly, to achieve a more holistic approach, participant voice must be a leading, or equal voice alongside other stakeholders, to address positions of power in meaning-making of experience. In Figure 9, I highlight how subtle changes in framing the narrative of an evaluation can be made, to place participants' experiences and reflections as paramount, triangulated by additional stakeholders. This framework addresses many of the problematics explored within this study and provides a positive contribution to knowledge generation within the participatory arts.

## FRAMING IMPACT- POWER DYNAMICS AND THE NARRATIVE



Figure 9

Potential questions to consider when approaching evaluation grounded in a hopeful and compassionate model include:

- Who is in power? Does this power shift throughout a project? If so, how can the power shifts be illuminated in the evaluation?
- Whose knowledge is privileged in the evaluation? Is all knowledge explored, or is some omitted to beautify the narrative?
- How can additional stakeholder voices triangulate findings? Additionally, how can other stakeholders' voices be presented where they do not validate the findings?

The following recommendations can be applied to existing evaluation frameworks and data collection methods or can be used to develop new strategies that encompass stakeholders needs, whilst staying rooted in a desire to voice plurality of experience.

A hopeful and compassionate approach to evaluation:

### **Recognises wider societal influences and hegemonic norms that are prevalent in evaluation design.**

- Names these within reporting.
- Acknowledges evaluative bias towards further marginalisation of participants.
- Considers power and privilege within reporting.
  - Who is the report for and how much information do they require?

### **Seeks genuine consent from participants.**

- Consent is sought at the start and at further points throughout the programme.

- Do participants know how their data will be used? Will they have opportunity to view it prior to use? Are they given opportunity to read final reporting?

#### **Acknowledges participants as individuals and as creatives**

- Names participants (using real name or pseudonym), rather than 'participant', 'service user', 'client', 'young person', 'beneficiary' etc. when discussing individual experiences and outcomes.
- In participatory arts practice, where possible place participants as creatives, selecting terms such as collaborators, theatre-makers, creatives, artists, etc.

#### **Names positionality of evaluator and organisational bias in reporting.**

- Acknowledges that the evaluator can be complicit in perpetuating positive or negative representations of Other.
  - How does the organisation/evaluator know the group?
  - Do they have lived experience similar to that of the participant group or prior knowledge/expertise in the area?
- The audience for the report is made explicit.

#### **Considers the textual framing applied and use of participants' personal background and story.**

- Story-based and narrative approaches are employed to illustrate participant experience and promote learning.
- Contextualization of participant's life story/current circumstances is treated with care and compassion.
  - Does inclusion of personal details aid participant growth and demonstrate stronger connection to outcomes? Is the use of personal information self-serving, demonstrating organisational 'success' in reaching intended demographics and outcomes to satisfy funding criteria and targets? What information is truly needed to 'validate' outcomes? How are emerging and unintended outcomes explored?

#### **Reports honestly and accurately, using quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate key points with transparency.**

- Statistics are described in full and are not applied as 'smoke and mirrors' to gloss over what could be seen as failures or areas in need of improvement.
  - Are statistics used fairly and paint a picture of actual growth? Are statistics used for the sole purpose of demonstrating targets have been achieved? Are they inflated, wherein if unpicked, the actuals are much lower? E.g. 240 attendances achieved could also be more honestly reported as '10 participants taking part in 24 sessions of 2 hours, totalling 48 hours of contact'.
- Qualitative data is used to evidence all parts of programming: participant and organisational learning and change, not only as validation from the most outspoken participants and ones that confirm organisational hypotheses.
- Include full spectrum of participation across stakeholders with consideration of what participation means within the context of the programme.
  - How are participants who choose to leave a project described within evaluation and how is the narrative around their leaving presented? How is participation amongst those that leave a programme captured in statistics?

#### **Considers correlation and causation of impact to its fullest.**

- There is a clear differentiation between impacts that are directly associated with participants on the project and those that are more aligned to wider influences.

- What skills did the participant arrive with? Where there other training and development activities the participant engage in parallel to taking part that may have impacted engagement and outcomes?
- Ownership of change sits firmly with the participant, supported by the organisation. There is a clear differentiation between further impact associated with a participant and the organisation as time passes.
  - At what point is it time to stop using a participant's story as evidence without checking in with them? At what point can an organisation no longer claim the successes of a participant as connected to engagement with the organisation?

**Places agency with participants to direct personal narrative.**

- Situates the participant as owner of their own knowledge and growth.
- Considers participant schema as starting point for personal growth.
- Writing comes from a place of with-ness, friendship, and hope with and for participants.
  - How does the narrative change when participants are viewed as individuals who may choose to read a report?
- Reciprocity is accounted for, ensuring participants 'get something' out of the evaluation experience.

**Employs an asset-based approach to discussion and outcomes.**

- Eschews deficit language.
- Is appreciative of growth, regardless of breadth and predetermined expectations.

**Is holistic in its approach.**

- Triangulating findings with emphasis on participant voice as dominant.
  - How can participant experience be supported and deepened through further stakeholder voice?
  - How can conflicting interpretations of outcomes be explored with honesty and integrity?
  - Consider when organisational observations/feedback on participant outcomes is more relevant than participant feedback.

**Embraces failure as a site for learning.**

- Acknowledges where programming was not delivered as intended and where outcomes differ from expectation with openness and care.
- Provides recommendations to mitigate further failure.

**Employs a theory of hope.**

- Presents participants' futures as hopeful opportunities.
- Underpins the evaluation process with hope for better collective and individual futures for participants, hope of engaging and thought-provoking experiences within the project; and hope of social change via the project and participants working in collaboration.

**Is accountable to ALL its stakeholders including participants, facilitators, organisational team, trustees, support staff, and funders.**

This approach considers the plurality of experience. It also considers how best to gather data that is meaningful, acceptable and co-created. The approach encourages participants, practitioners, and organisations to reflect on the delivery model, the instrumental and intrinsic value of the engagement, and wider connections their work makes. I assert that this hopeful and compassionate approach acknowledges failures within programming in an appreciative manner, using failure as a site for organisational reflexive action, new learning, and the reimagining of future programming that reflects participant experience and impacts. By involving the whole of an organisation, rather than seeing projects in a siloed manner, new connections can be made and utilised towards systemic change. Using embedded key tenets of with-ness, friendship, hope and reflexivity in evaluation, there is opportunity to disrupt processes that perpetuate inequity, by highlighting conflicting views and assumptions, and challenging power dynamics. Use of reflexivity can also aid in the avoidance of stereotyping participants and continued marginalisation within the evaluative process.

The conceptual framework I propose in this chapter considers Matarasso's assertion that the creative and cultural sector needs a 'fundamental rethink of how, when and why participatory arts is evaluated and what use is made of the results' (2019, p. 195). I assert there needs to be a radical shift in *how* evaluation is approached and consideration of *whom* the evaluation is for. I advocate for disrupting power imbalances which see the funder or organisation as the end reader of an evaluation report, instead placing participants as the first readers. In doing so, the narrative changes: placing strengthened value on humanising the experience of engagement, acknowledging the intrinsic and instrumental value of participation, and framing participants as knowledge holders and changemakers. I recognise that there needs to be accountability for spend of funds and achieving the project aims, yet laborious processes of reporting in such structured ways is usurping participants of ownership of change. Indeed, once an evaluation report reaches the funder or is read internally by an organisation, what is the value of the report? By placing participants at the centre of the discussion and writing for and/or with them, the evaluation continues to be a useful and living document from which participants can consider their own change in the long-term; and organisations can reflect and strengthen programming from a holistic viewing.

#### *Who leads evaluation and where does it live?*

The conceptual framework I put forward begins to address *how*, *why* and for *whom* evaluation is undertaken. The *by whom* evaluation is undertaken also needs addressing as does the consideration of where evaluation lives once it is completed. Many arts organisations undertake impact evaluation themselves, as experts in their programming and participant group they can make connections and



draw out the information they would find most valuable. Some commission external researchers to complete evaluation, providing a more authoritative framing or objectivity to the report. Such external reports<sup>32</sup> can delve deeper into specific areas and engage in meaning-making that might not have been explored from an internal perspective. A third form of collaborative reporting sees the independent researcher and organisation developing the report together to elaborate and provide context. And a fourth form sees participatory action research, inviting the participants to the table to develop the evaluation and approach. Throughout these models there are varying approaches to address successes and failures, or areas that need addressing to improve impact and affect change.

Throughout this thesis I have established that a robust evaluation strategy allows for plurality of voice to be explored. Even with the allowance of multiple truths, there will still be power struggles in stakeholders' ability to articulate experience, and for some, to effectively engage in self-reflective thinking. In some regards a participant may hold power, feeling able to share both positive and negative feedback as they are not reliant on the outcome of the feedback; whereas another might see their responses as affecting their future opportunities with the organisation. Other stakeholders, such as project managers and facilitators, who are directly dependent on the funding may acquiesce or temper their negative responses to ensure a positive report and further funding (Freeman, R., Edward and Dmytriyev, 2017). Such subjectivities must be accounted for within the evaluation process.

Equally important is consideration of the legacy of evaluative reporting. Where does the information live once completed and how can it be accessed by the wider creative and cultural sector? Many creative organisations hold evaluation reports on their websites. This is most welcomed, yet in order to find it, one must know what they want to locate first. The creation of a wider repository for evaluation of participatory arts programmes and research compiled would be advantageous for the sector, to share, learn and expand knowledge. As example, The Arts and Social Justice have a portal for housing evaluation reports on programming connected to social justice. Although not a huge database at present, this begins the process and validates the sharing of knowledge. Funders and arts advocates such as Paul Hamlyn and A New Direction additionally hold knowledge banks which are useful places to visit to find further resources. Again, these are small databases, but are the beginning of strengthened knowledge sharing.

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<sup>32</sup> See [Dream Arts](#) and [London Bubble](#) for examples of independent impact reports.

## Concluding remarks

Change is needed in how we conceive and digest evaluation of participatory arts programmes. Freire suggests, '[t]here is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope' ((Freire and Freire, 2014, p. 81). This thesis is hopeful, inviting openness to experimentation and allowance of plurality of perspectives to inform and develop discussions, whilst also situating discussion in the historical lineage of social impact and the arts, evaluative methodologies, and participatory arts practice. The depth of discussion presented within this thesis is illustrated through the critical case study of Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's programming with young people. I am indebted to Lyric for allowing me the opportunity to take this journey with them; to probe, interrogate, disrupt, and reimagine what evaluation of participatory arts experience can be.

The specified timing of my research did not demonstrate START at its zenith nor of Young Lyric's programming. Whilst there were numerous moments of great care and compassion in working with young people, examples of amazing artistic work created with participants, and strengthened communication channels; these were juxtaposed by inconsistency of approach, changing expectations and disparate allocations of power. The timing of my research was difficult given the changes in leadership at Lyric, reduction in funding, and one must not forget, a global pandemic. Changes in leadership are a given, and Lyric has worked diligently since reopening in June 2021 to support its vision through action. This is a positive step towards ensuring quality of programming and care for those participating in Young Lyric. There is still further work to be done on Lyric's part to understand participant experience and to reimagine programming that meets the needs of its desired participant base as well as organisational agendas. Each encounter with a young person at Lyric stayed with me as I considered how to collate the experiences they had shared with me: the moments of joy, their reflections on building trust and where trust was broken, their aspirations for the future and pathways they were building. The conceptual framework developed in this chapter is in response to the amazing young people I was honoured to work with at Lyric.

Throughout this thesis I explored my role as a researcher, collaborator, and critical friend in discussion with Lyric. At times Lyric's work with young people seemed at odds with organisational priorities, yet there was always a continued desire to engage and nurture the creativity of young people. I contend that the critical case study developed and recommendations within this thesis is representative of other participatory arts programmes and highlights the need for wider discussions. My research additionally diverges from the act of purely analysing impact and addressing value of programming, to considering the lenses used to analyse such data, who it favours and what its

intentions are. The critical case study and subsequent framework seeks to realign power and move evaluative framing forward to asset-based and hopeful language that celebrates individual change alongside the collective. Imperative to this design is a move away from self-congratulatory reporting on achieving aims towards compassionate approaches to supporting participant pathways.

This research positively contributes to the field of participatory arts, providing arts organisations and practitioners with recommendations for reimagining their approach to evaluation of programming. Furthermore, in placing participants as knowledge holders and changemakers, who will be active readers of evaluative outputs, there is an opportunity to rebalance power and utilise evaluation as a proactive tool for future growth. The research and recommendations provided to Lyric have already led to changes within START, Lyric's wider thinking about the language used, and how to evaluate programming *with* and *for* young people. I invited Rob Lehmann, Lyric's current Director of Young People and Nicholai La Barrie, previous Director of Young People, and now Associate Director, to read a final draft of this thesis and to provide their reflections<sup>33</sup>. Their feedback highlighted the unique perspectives we each take based on our personal schema, current role/s, and attachment to the data. Importantly, both situated the critical case study and recommendations as historic documentation of what has occurred, but also as a journey that will continue to be shaped over time. I look forward to seeing how Lyric addresses these recommendations in the years to come, and how they welcome plurality of experience to inform future planning *with* and *for* young people.

In closing, I lead by example, placing participant voice as paramount:

*A long time ago man decided to repaint the world in a way that suited himself and deceive his brothers into seeing through his eyes instead of their own. This led to division with new individuals creating false paths, acting as false leaders, deceiving those who once saw clearly. This spawned an epidemic of people abandoning the truth in reward for cheap identity, based on divisions that once didn't exist. This was the abandoning of the objective for the subjective. These are the circumstances in which I was born. A mirage of what is real, a half empty glass. An endless sea of ideas covering the truth deep inside of it. Perception. That is me.*

*And here you are, here to hear the stories of the modern idea. The age of information. Here you will hear stories of conflict and resolution surrounding young people. Perhaps they are fresh perspectives as they are from fresh minds with a fresh perspective of the world. Perhaps these are old stories which the prior generations cemented into the young as a pathetic attempt to have them solved. Whether they are worthy of your attention is for you to decide.*

*Elijah, START 2019*

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<sup>33</sup> See Appendices A and B for full transcripts of interviews.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Reflective Interview with Nikolai La Barrie

27 March 2023

**Background:** *Nicholai was Director of Young Lyric from 2015-2019 and returned to Lyric as Associate Director in 2021. He worked with LSBU to develop the Collaborative PhD call for this research. Nicholai provided guidance and support in the initial stages of my research. As with my reflective interview with Rob, Nicholai read a draft of my thesis. He suggested a follow-up discussion to reflect on the experience and to add value to specific discussions. I very much welcomed this opportunity and the subsequent discussion, which highlights the organisational shifts and power dynamics at play.*

**Kristina:** Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. As I noted in my email, this transcribed interview will sit in the appendices of my thesis. I refer in my thesis to the fact that you and Rob both read a draft of my thesis and that this interview allows for the critical case study to be discussed and to frame it as more of a living document, to align learning and note where things are being actioned. That sometimes it was my recommendations that instigated change but other times, Lyric was also noticing similar things at the same time and was working on addressing them.

**Nicholai:** That's really fair. And that's sort of what I thought after I read it. It's with me, where you started the process. And then Rob, who ended the process with you. This gives a place to fill in the blanks a little bit, to put some context to certain things. And to just, make it a living thing, because the whole point of doing it to start off was for us to really do a deep dive evaluation into one project that we're working on. For us to ask the question, is it actually serving users that we needed to serve, and to have a clinical sort of, forensic response to what we were doing, so that we could align with what you so beautifully defined from your research. So, we could align what we say in funding applications and what we're actually doing on the ground. And it's not always aligned. And if we ever get back to a place where we feel we had been, which is the 'tail chasing', we're not doing anything really effectively, I suppose, if that makes sense.

**Kristina:** Yes, that does make sense. So that kind of goes towards my first question, which was, what your overall response was to the case study?

**Nicholai:** I think it's very good. I think it's very fair minded. That it's really quite clear, and even, and I think it's absolutely right, that the perspective is really from the young people that we were working with. I think that the thing that I got from it is, the more I actually thought about it and working in arts organisations, is the hierarchies that exist in arts organisations, are for want of a better word, a little bit of bullshit. Because of the gaps in information where you go, something has changed, and I don't quite know what it is. But now it feels like when it focuses on us that, in real practical terms, did real damage. Like real, real damage to my department and to the projects that we're working on. Because what you sort of described was a change in direction, was a real lack of transparency around why some decisions were being taken. A lack of deep understanding of strategy, like long-term strategy. [Looking to previous years] as long as you put something down and try to do it over one year, then if it doesn't quite work out over that one particular year, you forget the whole thing. You start, you pivot to something else. None of this makes any sense. There was a real lack of leadership, a real genuine lack of love for theatre. And so, it was interesting reading what you wrote.

And looking at, where you say, 'I don't understand what's happened here', from where I was sitting, I know what happened, I can thread through all the bits that lead to [moments, like] when you describe the focus of the work changed into more performance-based work and not so much on the pastoral care and all of that stuff. I know exactly what happened. And, it has a lot to do with a lack of

resources in one respect, a real genuine lack of resources, a lack of money. And then a real genuine lack of strategic leadership, piss poor strategic leadership. I take responsibility for some of that, too, because I think I was too eager to please. I suppose too eager to keep the peace and eager to agree with people who I realised later didn't understand what they were doing. And at best, were incompetent and, at worst, malevolent in the way they operated with other people.

So, I think it's fair. That is the short answer.

**Kristina:** Thank you. I think it's really interesting for me, especially like talking with you now, and thinking back to some of the strategy conversations you and I had, and then strategy with the team. And it's clear that you knew where things were going, but that didn't necessarily trickle down to the team. And I think, I was kind of stuck in the middle: trying to get up to speed, and not having the historical knowledge that you had, but somehow, I seemed to have had more than some of the people in the team. So, it was really interesting, trying to weave that all together.

**Nicholai:** Yeah. And I think sometimes there is a little bit of wilful ignorance, I suppose. I think some of it is wanting to stay in your lane, a little bit, and not move outside of it. And the balancing act between realising that you are running something and in charge of it, and being a part of it is two different things. And I suppose what we needed was a way to describe that to people. I think also there was, and you described it as 'a lack of training', there was a real lack or gaps in people's information. From basic things, like, the pastoral care needs changing for the young people. And from the period of time that START that was changing, where it was about getting them on board, giving them food and money to get there and a job after, to really complex things that the skill level just wasn't there to deal with. And, then managing of the team and managing the processes in that way. I don't think [the team] really understood what had happened. They couldn't see it, couldn't see it from that perspective at that time, you know... [Maybe] a little bit too close and [needing] to step away a little bit ... And also, [the team] didn't trust [the leadership] and you had me trying to be a broker between the two, [it] was nearly impossible. And [as the team left, they took] with them all this information, you know, all the knowledge of it. And whereas, I think, strategy wise, what could have possibly happened, was [the team] could have been there for four more years and turn it into a whole project.... It could have been a real model of a thing that could have been set up and, and grown elsewhere.

**Kristina:** Thank you, that's really helpful. It's very interesting as well, because you [recall a different era almost, than what I do, because of your role and time at Lyric].

**Nicholai:** There was sort of a golden era before you arrived, with [the Young Lyric Team]. The team were really, really good because the gift that they ... had was to spur each other on, to work a little bit harder, when they were fighting for things, which is really cool. But I think the best time we had was probably from 2015, up until ... the beginning of 2018, or something like that. And it was really cooking, it was like really good. Everybody was working really hard. And then finances changed a little bit. And it became really apparent that the amount of stuff we were doing was ambitious, the amount of stuff we were just doing was too much. It was just too many things going on. And we had grown like a virus because, you know, we were asked to grow. When we first opened the building, there was nobody who came into the building. So that was six months of 2015. I mean, Kristina, crickets, like crickets, none of the classes were packed. It was just a massive building that had cost 20 million pounds that nobody was coming into. And it was frankly embarrassing. The partners wanted to leave, they wanted to go. So, all I was getting, like nearly on a daily basis was you have to grow, grow, grow, grow, grow. That was it. It was like, at all costs, no matter what you do, make sure everything is full all the time.

And I mean, I said this more times than I could imagine, I would say to everybody, it will, people will come, they just have to know who we are and what we're doing. And then we did this thing where we went into all the schools. So, we spent, like from the end of 2015, every single week, till maybe that whole school year, I met every single principal, I met every single head. I met every single chair of Board of Governors; I met drama teachers. We went to every single, tiny little drama project, anything that had young people in Hammersmith and Fulham, we went to, we talked to them, we built projects with them, we invited them into the building, we gave away free tickets for things. And we just like, built and built and built and by the end of 2016 it was packed. And then it started to make a little bit of money. And so right after that, it was just grow, grow, grow more, more, more and more and more. And over the course of three years, it grew exponentially to the point where we're adding classes because there's so many kids and adding in projects and then it got too big. It just got too big to sustain itself. You can't sustain ... without adding more staff ... Because if you have this three-part thing which is like a cafe and a food service, a producing theatre and then a young people's department, the theatre has to be the biggest thing. The theatre has to be the thing that brings the most amount of money, right? If that's bringing in, I don't know, like 2 million pounds a year, which is appropriate... We [ Young people's department] ...were nearly bringing in a million pounds, my budget was £990,000 at one point, which is, which is bananas, right? Because it just means that you have to, you just have to do more and more and more and more and more. And we physically couldn't add any more classes into the building. We physically couldn't do more activities. And they couldn't write more applications. And thus, the budgets grew. And, you know, I was the only person walking around going, we have to stop doing this. And I think you described that, that 'everybody was working in silos and there was too many things going on'. In that time period, I was saying, over and over and over and over and over, we're doing too many things. We're cannibalising our projects. We can't continue like this. Something is going to happen and it will fall apart. We can't just keep going like this. And what happens? From January to July, X leaves, Y leaves, and Z leaves. Boom, boom, boom, 1,2,3 gone. And while trying to replace somebody, somebody else is leaving, ... and there is this massive amount of work that is still running, which isn't helpful either. And I'm saying ... this is unsustainable. We are losing staff. The business model that we have in this organisation doesn't work.

[I'm told] ... the business plan works. I'm like, I am not talking about the business plan, the business plan is the business plan, is what we aim to do, and what the ambition, which is absolutely right. The model, the how we do things, the how we put this together on a daily basis is simply untenable. It cannot work anymore. We've lost staff, everybody's overworked, everybody feels underpaid, and are dropping like flies...

[I suggested ...] we have to do something now to address what the next five years is going to be. And I said to in my estimation, what needs to happen over the next five years is that we need to scale down our classes, we need to focus the areas of work into what they are. Not making it a homogenous kind of one size fits all thing, we have to if we're going to strategically put together a plan of work that looks like a sort of, more academic approach to the classes that we have. And we write those things down. So, you come in at six, and you leave at 21. And these are all the different things you can do. But this is how it aligns with the academics in school. This is how it aligns with, with what you might go on to do if you want to get a job, this is how we accredited and things. We've got to lean into the education work, as being in schools and for schools, and making the work that we do on stage relate to the things, which obviously Rob is doing now it's working really well. And we [think about] START and REWIND, the process and product and how they aligned. The end result of what we were doing became super important and it became trying to have these really polished performances when it didn't necessarily have to have a performance you know. ... The aim for us was to help everybody get a job in the end. When [Producer] left, all this information about ... job centres went too. Jobs at the end of START was a really critical thing that we had to lean into. ...



We have to make sure that these people are having entry into work or stop doing everything altogether. ... If the purpose is about reengaging in people who have dropped out of society, (quote, unquote), then the idea is that we want to get them back into society in some kind of way. The age bracket at the end means that probably a job is what is what is what they should be going into. Sometimes it might be school, sometimes it might be, you know, foundation courses, or whatever it is. But mostly we're looking at jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs. So, we're trying to get them into and not focus so much on performances. [And the] argument... always was with that funders want to come and see them perform. And I was like, well, we have to make a better case, to the funders about what we do and why we do it. And sometimes they can't always see our performance of it, it might have to be something slightly different. So, all of this stuff is going on, I'm trying to say all of this ...this is what the strategy should be over the next five years, that it points at the work on the stage in a kind of way that is very smart. And sort of, you know, not just haphazard. And I ... [was told...], the business plan works, and we don't [need] to fix anything. That's like, I just sat here and told you I lost three members of staff in six months. And the department is in crisis. And your like 'we good'? ...

[I left that meeting realising] ... that there is no plan. And there was a simple kamikaze approach to everything that we're doing. And that is dangerous for us. Because it means that I may have signed up for, anything to happen and to go along with anything. I don't know if you know me, I need a plan. ... As a director, you got to know what you're doing on day one. So that by the end of four weeks, you have something that's onstage that somebody can come and see, and they can pay money for. Without a plan, doesn't work for me.

*[...] Following a further discussion on strategy within a Senior Management Team meeting, it became apparent that strategic vision and models of working were not aligned. Trust was broken, resulting in Nicholai handing in his resignation.*

I just thought I couldn't do it anymore. Because... [there] was no plan and ... everything that we'd worked to build over that time...things just get caught in '30,000 attendances', but what does that mean? That doesn't mean anything.

**Kristina:** Oh, it means a lot if you're trying to appease [funders] and you're looking at it through that lens.

**Nicholai:** But I think that the reality of it is, actually what happened is that we worked with 5000 young people. Genuinely with worked with them and this is amazing.

**Kristina:** I think so. I think that's a big deal.

**Nicholai:** But then it's a huge deal that our theatre on the edge of London has encountered and actively done projects with, or have engaged with young people to see shows, 5000 of them. I mean, that's a big deal. But that is just a number, and you could hide everything in that area.

**Kristina:** Thank you, that really helps. ...The hierarchies and structural issues [that I describe are even] bigger, yet that isn't what I was there to research.

**Nicholai:** But that's what I mean, when at such a strategic level ... what happens is that as it flows downhill, nobody either buys into what the strategy is, believes what the strategy is, or really understands what the strategy is, because it keeps jumping, keeps jumping from one foot to the next.

**Kristina:** I'd like to now move forward to ...to a more positive context, [and the changes implemented in the] post-Covid recovery phase. My research with START almost ends, with this return. ... But I know that the structure with Rob in place and a different team, things have moved on. But I wonder if you can from your perspective as Associate Director place, what kind of things have been implemented since coming back, that show positive growth. And like I'm thinking more Heart of Hammersmith and the use of creative enablers for example. Like how can some of the learning on the [community production] be pulled into the way in which [Young Lyric] might work? It's a different way of working, but it's quite similar, if that makes sense.

**Nicholai:** I think that that, like I was saying I think, process and product is the most important thing, like it has to be process led. And instead of approaching and working as a director or actor training, it has to be again, a creative enabler, somebody who is supportive of a process, and this is the other difficult thing, right? Who holds that? So, to produce and to hold that process that that might seemingly feel like it doesn't have anywhere it's going, because it doesn't have a specific end result? Or does it have to have a performance at the end of it?

Heart of Hammersmith was really interesting, right? Because we knew from the from the beginning that we wanted to do a performance with all these different kinds of people it was going to be led by a company in their the early 20s. But we wanted to invite all of these other people as well, which meant that there needed to be a plan. During the process I felt there was enough time to germinate ideas, we had six months from the point of meeting those guys. I met them every week. Again, I had a really specific plan of like the format that was really clear. There were some givens, like the size of the cast, it's got to be set in one place ... There has to be a focal point where everybody ends up on stage for some reason, there has to be a reason for everybody. And then up on stage, we got to delve into the lives of certain people, we got to get to know certain people, all of these different kinds of things. And so, the way that we built that was really interesting in that, in that we kept talking about, so their research was what community means to them, what family means to them, what the place where they live in means to them. And they would go out and either record things or write things or, or, or get, like, they would go and talk to local businessmen, they would find stories from their grandparents and all that and bring all of those things in. And, then we would workshop those ideas around that. And from that, I would take those scenes that we workshopped and build them into scenes that would be written by me. But then then what happens, after that is we go back, and we work on the scenes and change things as they were happening.

So we would have a back and forth relationship of, oh, that doesn't work that, feels wrong, that like that feels a little bit too exposing, to me, we shouldn't do that, or we should refocus it, there was that storyline of, of one of the boys having a having like a sort of a rent boy relationship with men, and he didn't really feel comfortable about it. So, we dial that down. And then he felt really comfortable about it, so we dial it back up, we went back and forth for a long time. So, the structure was really clear that we were in we had some parameters that we had to hit that everybody knew that from the beginning, everybody knew that's what we were going into. I guess that's that that kind of thing is really important. [Thinking about START], I think putting it on stage is the thing we probably shouldn't be doing anymore, like putting it on the main stage, but the way that Rob has set up, and I think his team is really effective now. So, the directors are trained really differently now. They are employed for a lot longer, so it's not jumping from one director to the next. ... which means they have consistency, which means they grow the projects as they understand us a little bit more, which means they're involved with the organisation in a much deeper kind of way. And they understand us a little bit more. ...

And we now have [Outreach Officer onboard and they] have the skills to [assist START], they are compassionate and caring ... and understand how to use drama and theatre. I thought initially, when

I read your report, I was like, oh, that pivot to making it more creative is a bad thing. And I don't know, maybe not. I don't know. I don't know if that is a bad thing. Certainly [Lyric's current leadership] aims to focus the organisation on performance and performative output. I think START probably has a journey to go on in that, to arrive at a place where the mechanism of change is art. And not necessarily the end product having to be something that is polished. I don't know if that makes sense.

**Kristina:** It makes perfect sense. Yes. And I think it's about [redefining the aims of START].

**Nicholai:** And also recognising that, that we are a part of that journey. We're not the entire journey. And, how we signpost people onto things after. What role we play, in which part of the journey.

**Kristina:** Thank you very much. My last question was, is there anything else that you think I should have addressed? Anything that is definitely not been touched upon, that probably should have been?

**Nicholai:** No. I think you addressed everything, I think what would be very useful is if you would help me and Rob to pull together your recommendations as a kind of document we might use as our roadmap for things going forward.

**Kristina:** Yeah, I think that's a great idea. It's, it's been on my list of things to do. A condensed version of findings with recommendations, and perhaps a bit more connection to the wider Young Lyric programming.

**Nicholai:** I think ... we are just now understanding how to make theatre ... it felt like we lost our way a little bit and tightening the screws around making really good shows, right? ... Rallying the troops around that and getting every department onboard. It's kind of like being a Nike factory and going, well we got to stop making cars, we got to stop making computers. We got to keep making shoes, like we're good at making shoes, let's make shoes and focus all our efforts there. No matter what bits of the business we are in, if it's laces or marketing or you know, more food for the employees, all our efforts got to go into making shoes. And I think that's been a really long three-year process that we just started to see the rewards from, and you can see it in the programme. The programme is getting more ambitious, but it's also getting better. And we've had a good run of shows that have been in the theatre... It feels like the right balance because the focus is on the main house and the work we are making. And everything else is gonna play ball with that. And in a way, I think we are arriving at a place where everybody else is understanding what the focus of the theatre is.

**Kristina:** Yes, and that comes with stronger leadership, and a bit more of a roadmap that tells you how to get there.

**Nicholai:** Yeah, and also trusting it. Like, you know, I've worked there [in this role] for what, two years now ... and even when I left, ... we [Lyric's Artistic Director and I] used to talk once a week on the phone. And then I came back and started working and trusting what her vision is for the place. But also trust [that] it isn't going to happen in one year. It's not going to happen after two shows. It isn't going to happen right in the pandemic, we might have a run of four shit shows, but the idea is that is everybody's going to be playing the same game here and everybody's going to be going the right direction. That to me, let's see where it goes, but I'm definitely on board.

**Kristina:** Thank you so much. That's a perfect way to end it.

## Appendix B: Reflective Interview with Rob Lehmann

23 March 2023

**Background:** *Rob has been a consistent source of information across my research process, since taking the post of Director of Young Lyric in January 2020. We have had numerous discussions about my research, START, and strategy for Young Lyric over the years. After reading a draft of my thesis and providing helpful comments, we agreed that a follow-up discussion to reflect on his reading of the case study, and its usefulness for Lyric as an organisation would be advantageous. As the research was part of a collaborative PhD, it is also a useful opportunity to allow space for reflection from Lyric.*

**Kristina:** What is your overall response to the critical case study presented in my thesis?

**Rob:** My overall response is that it's very insightful, in terms of the history of START in particular. For me, being in this role without knowing its full legacy, its conception and inception, and what it did at the beginning, in terms of where the government were, where politics were, where what the qualifications were, and how that was really reflective, and kind of forward thinking of the times.

And then to see how START is now, and how that shifted, which is a lot more reflective of, I would say, the kind of waves we are trying to make within industry in terms of addressing representation, equal access, equality of opportunity. To see how much the programme really shifted from employment skills to theatre making skills. This happened gradually, over time, it didn't feel like it happened overnight. It had a good, maybe decade, slowly, but surely were it shifted or it evolved. At times it was connected to the building, with the government, with everything that was going on. That is how that project evolved and it's really useful to know its history. I think what we have now is very different to what was created, and it has very different outputs in many ways, but follows a similar model, for better, and for worse in some cases.

But what is really great to know is the impetus and what is important in working with young people, whether that be through employability skills, or through creative skills, and life skills, and all of those things that come together at the Lyric. It positions Lyric as having a really long track record of working with young people either through the social side, the artistic side, or the pastoral side. It really cements the legacy of that work, which is really insightful and useful to know. It has a long history, and hopefully, has a very successful future. We just received further multiyear funding from the Ironmongers Charity for three years of START. So, it's really useful now to know that this thesis brings up some recommendations, or things that we're doing great, and things that can be sharpened. Also, how we further embed some of the changes. Some have already been made but others are definitely still on a journey. How do we embed them so that in three years' time, we can look back at this and find its real use in terms of shaping what the next few years of START look like within this NPO funding cycle.

**Kristina:** Thank you. And it is really nice to hear about further funding for START. Is there any further context you can give to support specific aspects of the case study? Or looking at it from an organisational perspective, aspects that you think perhaps needs a bit more explanation?

**Rob:** I think what I would say is, firstly, kudos to you because you've probably done this research at the most difficult time of that project's history, that I can recall or know of. In terms of the staffing changes, from artistic leadership to leadership of the department, to the leadership of the project,

to the building closing, the team being furloughed, to transitions to young people feeling like they were left by the Lyric when all of our staff had left and went on furlough. And, then when they did return, their first point of return was through your research. So, that's definitely worth taking into account. In different circumstances, I'm still sure there would have been young people having very different experiences based on what pathways they decided to take, or what pathways were available to them. Also, how projects have been positioned to them from their referral agency and where they are in their stage of life. But a key part of the inconsistency has to be the fact that all those changes left us in a myriad, where we didn't know where we were going week to week, day to day within the world and within our organisation, based on the global pandemic that absolutely stopped everything within its tracks.

**Kristina:** Thank you. My last kind of in-depth look at the work with START participants was the summer 2021, and then I was able to see the project that took place in December 2022. But that's kind of where my, my research stops. So, can you provide any examples of how programming or the structure has changed since then to support some of the recommendations or some of the issues that I brought up within the thesis itself?

**Rob:** So, I think the biggest change for us is the appointment of a full-time Outreach Officer, whose job is solely to build relationships with referral agencies, all year round, not just when we're recruiting for START so we have a real, deep, tangible relationship with who's on the ground working with vulnerable young people across West London. Equally, that person then oversees all of the enrolment stages and the pathways. We now have a pathway planner and checker, in terms of every young person that comes on, where are they, where are we either signposting them to internally or externally, where we've been able to send them. So that it doesn't feel as such that the end START is the start of their journey. And for some, it's the start of their creative journey, and they'll go off and have maybe a lifetime of a career in a theatre, that's for a very small few. For others, it might be that this six-week programme has helped them to gain confidence, gained their ability to speak to one another, to have teamwork skills, to understand a little bit more about who they are, and what they have to bring to life, society, culture, all of those different things. And we're very keen to continue supporting them but ensuring that we're really clear that it is a six-week programme, that will end and how do we best support you. So, whoever has referred the young person, be that your social worker, be that your housing advisor, to then continue on beyond so that you don't feel lost after weeks and feel like you've had a six week almost bliss of provision, bliss of pastoral care, and then all of a sudden, that's ripped from underneath you. That's something we're really strategically thinking through to make sure the care and diligence of those pathways and also the aftercare is just as good as that recruitment and enrolment stage, one almost needs to feed the other. And if we do a bad job, at the end, it underwrites all of the good work we might have done at the beginning. So, that's something we're constantly evaluating, talking to ourselves, and putting systems in place. Particularly the Outreach Officer, to ensure that that process runs as smoothly as possible. I think also, artistically the work now, over the last 18 months or so, and it's getting stronger, and is thematically in response to the work on the main house. And that is loose, and it still allows the young people to have a voice in terms of their say, of what's happening within society within the world, especially because of a lot of our work is quite current. It's very rare we do like a classic, we do many more remodelling of classics and bring them to the stage. So not only should it increase young people's cultural capital, but also their confidence, their ability to speak to theatre, to speak to the times and influence our artistic output. It feels like it's somewhat slightly stronger and has a deeper understanding. But also, it feels like the project is situated within a theatre. It's not in a church hall or it's not in a space that is a room within a theatre but has no connection to the wider

meaning of who we are and what we do. Intrinsically, when they come in, they have a tour of the theatre, they come into the staff they meet, they meet the team, we make sure we can try and get them into a show as soon as possible. The recent practitioner we worked with had a really brilliant scaffolding model where she had upon the wall of weeks one to six and what each week would look like, just as a loose outline. So that might be week 1x, getting to know each other; week two watching the show; week three exploring ideas for our performance; week four refining ideas; week five rehearsal; week six performance. So, it's really clear as those young people are in that room. They look on the board and see where they are and how that journey is scaffolded. So, they feel safe and held. And that's something that freelance director brought to us. But we're really keen to continue using that as an example of best practice.

**Kristina:** That's great. That's something I referred to in my recommendations as well. It's just having that kind of visual, that we are used to, that kind of setup you get in school, so we always know what's coming next. Not that you want to replicate the school environment but having some of those touch points where you're able to say, 'Okay, I know what's coming next', is helpful, especially for young people who are neurodiverse or just need that kind of additional support around them. Are there any examples of pathways that you can share with me from participants that kind of solidify the process that you want to see a young person go through, post-project? So, moving on from START?

**Rob:** Yeah, sure. I'll speak predominantly internally rather than externally at this stage. Our current 20 SPRINGBOARD participants include three START graduates from across different cohorts of START. We now cross refer with Spear, internally and externally. So, we sometimes receive young people from Spear's NEET employment programme, which is about employability. Sometimes, there's a young person there who has an interest in the arts, and then comes to us. Equally, we have young people that come to us that are interested in arts but might do might need to do another programme that can really shape them in interview technique, work with into employment, so we have a real good cross referral agency across Hammersmith and Fulham that works in a positive way. There's a few young people that are fertilising both of those programmes. In terms of our studio session, we have two young people that took part in START that are still part of studio sessions and are now expressing themselves vocally, creating beats. For some of them, yes, they're pursuing a career as a musician, but actually, it's improving their sense of achievement. Of actually working towards a sharing. Being able to say, I've come in on a 10-week class with other young people from all different walks of life and holding their own in that and feeling just as valued. And not that they're a marginalised young person really. It just breaks the mould of their identity of who they can be. And who we can see them as. So, when somebody does cross refer from one of those programmes, it's very likely that we won't touch upon the fact that they are a START graduate. For a lot of young people taking part, they don't know what START is. And actually, that might come with connotations that are not that helpful. So, we celebrate it internally and where we need to. But equally, we don't ever want to put the badge on of a young person being a START graduate. Actually, when you do come on to another project from START, you have just as much equality and opportunity as everyone else. And yes, we might need to provide a little bit more pastoral and financial support, but in terms of your artistic achievement, and creative achievement in that room, that should not be subject to whatever way you've come into that course be a paying member of the public, (that's parents of young people that have paid for it), or you on a bursary scheme, you still get the same access to provision and same access to creativity. There's young people on that adult acting class, which is 18 plus. There are four or five START graduates from different cohorts that come through to us that are constantly working towards sharings. And working on performance,

again, building their confidence, and integration with other adults is really exciting to see. Not only are they situated within a framework where there's 18 to 25 year olds, some of which are vulnerable and some that are not. If you are a young person who's graduated from START and you might be 21, and come into an intergenerational acting class with somebody in their 40s, this expands your horizon and your understanding of the world far better than a six-week programme can do. And that is very much the journey of cohesion into society from different ways. We have a pathway tracker to help keep tabs on what participants are moving towards.

**Kristina:** The pathway tracker is a great idea. I know it did exist for a while, that there was there's one, but I don't think it was updated since around 2016. But having that record and being able to go back, and to keep in contact.

**Rob:** Not only can we signpost to the Lyric classes, but we can also signpost to the partner classes. Especially as Lyric oversees the bursary fund, which some START graduates will need. If the if the young person was interested in dance, music, disability arts, whatever that is, we as the primary partner, have the ability to create a space on any of our partner activity. So, we've seen that happen with Moving Monday class with Action on Disability, DanceWest and Musiko Musika.

**Kristina:** We kind of touched upon this, but is there any part of the research that you feel was most valuable for Lyric and can be applied in the future? I know, I delivered an evaluation framework that has been implemented, so perhaps it's that. Or is there something else from your perspective?

**Rob:** I think both definitely, worth touching on the evaluation framework that allows us a robust, yet simplified way of actually tracking what we're looking to evaluate. I think for me, and I'm speaking as me in this role. The insight that you gave, in terms of language, in response to funders, organisation and participants- there's something really worth a deeper dive for myself into that. It's not present everywhere and it definitely requires some further thought, interrogation, and understanding of how those things all fit together. I understand how they interplay on surface level: apply to fund, a fund X needs these things, this project 'fits' fund x, so we applied to do that project. We evaluate, we then give the outputs that the project does and do so in regards to fund X and the remit for funding. And then for the participant, although that is part of it, is probably not the key area that they are interested in. That triangle, of that dynamic in terms of funder, organisation, young person, how that all fits together to make a whole picture is really interesting, thought provoking. And we will have to have some further interrogation and that's great. I don't know the answer to it because it's almost, I'd say, somewhat maybe systemic of arts and culture and grants. But actually, bringing it from the unconscious to the conscious allows us to be aware of it and then interrogate it further.

**Kristina:** Yeah. It's not something that's going to be solved overnight. Is it?

**Rob:** And I think what's so interesting about it is that it's a much wider issue. And so, I find it really valuable. Because it's not specific to the Lyric, it's not specific to START. It's specific to participatory arts, sport, whatever that grassroots type of work. It is almost youth sector specific.

**Kristina:** Yeah, I think it even goes further than participatory arts. I think it's further than the arts and cultural sector. I think it's anything that's funded, really. It's an interesting discussion, and we'll see how far I get with it. And my last question was, I wondered from your perspective, if there was anything else that you thought should be addressed? I mean, I don't have any space left to address in this thesis! But was there anything else you thought it should be addressing?

**Rob:** No, not particularly, I found again, back to the other question, what was also really valuable for me in this role is the history of Young Lyric, and how that work first came to be, and where I'm really clear and understand where it sits now; within our artistic and holistic vision, as an organisation and our business plan, but knowing how it formed and then evolved to where it is, is really useful to know. The history helps inform the journey we're currently going on. So, I'm really glad it is in the case study. And even though that's almost as a precursor to the context of START, and on what you're evaluating, it is really useful in terms of context and understanding of what the organisation looks like in terms of that work and how it came about.