The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia

Report by
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2016 Churchill Fellow

Exploring innovative examples of arts complementing education & inspiring engagement with learning.

When Winston Churchill was asked to cut arts funding in favour of the war effort, he simply replied, “then what are we fighting for?”

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Jane Tonkin
31 October 2017
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## KEYWORDS

Youth arts / education / young people / youth theatre /
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My family came on this trek too and I thank them for giving me space to conference, meet and scrawl notes, and for making sure I was fed and watered in between. The experience was rich for them too, far richer than a simple holiday. Thanks to my parents too, who provided a steady stream of encouragement and affirmation that buoyed me through the journey too.

The Fellowship connected me with a range of artists and arts managers, educators, and youth workers. People were extraordinarily generous with their time, insights and experience. The wealth of inspiration I have come away with is due to their willingness for open dialogue about their work and the arts and education sectors.

Thank you all.
Executive Summary

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Purpose

Explore innovative examples of arts complementing education and inspiring engagement with learning.

Overview

Visits to Finland, a world leader in arts in education, the UK, where there are many examples of the arts being used to increase engagement in arts and culture with a variety of objectives, and attending ASSITEJ to connect with colleagues working across the globe in arts and education, has deepened and extended my passion for, and current work in, this arena.

This project offered the opportunity to test the philosophy and approach of Corrugated Iron in a global setting.

Highlights

The 19th ASSITEJ World Congress and International Theatre Festival for Children and Young People in Cape Town, South Africa. The ASSITEJ Congress and Festival included the ITYARN [International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network] Conference, focus days and a presentation program. An extraordinarily rich experience with shows, performances and celebrations occurred alongside a provocative discussion program.

This was an inspiring start to my research and was a crucial part of many discussions later on with colleagues keen to know about the program.

Discussions with Creative Scotland, Arts Council UK, Youth Theatre Ireland and Finnish Youth Circus Association confirmed my prediction that examining the strategic level of investment in arts and education, and youth theatre companies and companies working with young people was going to provide significant learning.

The opportunity to see action through companies and organisations at work such as Circo, Oily Cart and the Dundalk Youth Centre, and the visits to Lycee franco-finlandais d’Helsinki and the Tain Arts Centre remain vivid experiences.

Significant Learnings

The Cultural Education Plan in Finland shares a strong resonance with my existing approach to Corrugated Iron’s Creative Schools Program but at a more strategic level. It provided timely inspiration to review how the Creative Schools Program pitches its next five years.

It is essential that everyone be made to feel comfortable when artists come into the classroom as the activity will agitate the natural state of the classroom. This is a
wonderful articulation of a regular talking point at Corrugated Iron at a time when we have been designing a how-to approach to tackle this issue.

Arts should not just link to curriculum but be the curriculum with skills, competencies and values representing an independent and sensitive way to entertain, evoke feelings and develop knowledge and cognition in everyday life.

Remember to think outside the box for instance when you have two groups at risk – unemployed drama graduates and learners studying drama – join them in a mentoring program as an after school diversion activity. A good reminder and a great example!

The role of peak associations is crucial to the sector remaining strong. Youth Theatre Ireland and the Finnish Youth Circus Association are prime examples. By contrast, peak bodies in Australia are folding providing challenges for the sector to remain connected.

The strength and value of Corrugated Iron’s work was confirmed. I lead Corrugated Iron on a principle of continual learning and so, whilst always refining, this research was a wonderful blend of reinforcement about the things we do well, and how to continue to raise the bar and be inspired by colleagues from across the globe.

**Dissemination and Implementation**

The sharing of the experience began with presenting to educators at the Festival of Teaching and sharing learnings with colleagues locally [arts sector and youth sector] and nationally.

This research has increased my eagerness for, and commitment to, long-term significant investment and change in supporting programs for young people and shifted how I think we can get there.

The consultation and rallying of educators and artists has begun. There is significant investment happening at early years, preparing young children to be school ready, and another investment in re-engagement programs designed to keep young people linked to school when they are struggling. In between is Corrugated Iron’s Creative Schools Program. As we emerge from the current funding cycle and look for new partners, this research is going to play a significant part in securing and building its future.

In 2018 I will continue to share the learnings from this research with the youth arts sector, educators and youth agencies. A group of educators has been created who are motivated to effect change working with artists.

In education, dictating the facts is where we are; the learner journey is where we want to be.
Background

I work for a youth arts organisation based in Darwin in northern Australia. We work with children, young people and early career artists in a broad program of skills development and performance opportunities. A significant part of our work is in schools in urban, regional and remote settings.

I have been at the helm of this flagship youth arts company for eleven years & have built its capacity to deliver ongoing innovative arts programs in urban & remote communities & diverse settings. Corrugated Iron’s Creative Schools Program is the result of my desire to interrogate how we educate children, especially those for whom mainstream education is not a good fit, and to offer alternatives to ensure our young people are prepared for life. The Churchill Project is underpinning my passion for, and informing, Corrugated Iron’s schools’ work across the top end of the Northern Territory.

The motivation for establishing the Creative Schools Program and for pursuing the Churchill Fellowship was seeing the long-term impact of students beginning school when they are not ready and/or moving through school without an opportunity to excel. I see the positive impact of providing creative experiences at school that enable these students to succeed and engage. We need to do so much more of this vital work, and the requests from schools to provide creative engagement is increasing. This work is crucial in the Northern Territory but the need, I learned, is also a global one.

This Churchill Fellowship will support the delivery of programs that increase the aspirational potential for young people and extend my, and Corrugated Iron’s, capacity to effect change in the communities we work in. Investment that will increase the aspirational potential for young people and improve young people’s chance in life benefits us all.
PROGRAMME

ASSITEJ 2017

The 19th ASSITEJ World Congress and International Theatre Festival for Children and Young People, Cape Town, South Africa, 16-27 May

The ASSITEJ Congress and Festival included the ITYARN Conference [International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network], focus days and a presentation of shows and performances.

ITYARN Conference

International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network, 16-17 May

Multidisciplinary theatre: fostering intercultural tolerance & educational reforms in Ghana & beyond
Dr Ekua Ekumah

Intercultural Exchange/Diversity
Dr Cheela Chilala with Prof. Karen Libman, Dr. Julius Heinicke and Mr. Stef De Paepe

Democracy/Citizenship
Mr Warren Nebe with Ms Jenny Koppera, Dr Kristin Junt, Sandra Grehn, Prof. Stephani Etheridge Woodson and Dr Mary McAvoy

Contemporary Writing and Expressive Literacy
Yvette Hardie, Beth Juncker, Suzanne LeBeau, and Sindiwe Magona

Theatre For Children By Children
Dr Pamela Udoka, Dr Tom Maguire, Prof Ojo-Rasaki Bakare, Ms Oluwatosin Tume, Ms Shaili Sathyu, Mr Gerhard Verfaillie

Children, Spectatorship & Diversity
Matthew Reason [USA]

Socially Conscious Theatre
Tom Maguire, Aracelia Guerrero, Megan Reid, Tamara Shulz, Norifumi Hida, Adam Ledger

National Approaches to Interculturality
Dr Veronica Baxter, Dr Monica Prendergast, Dr Niccole Carner, Dr Grigorios Ioannidis, Ms Sathya Bhamma Madathil

International Association of Theatre Critics – Mature Criticism in Children’s Theatre
Dr Octavia Saiu, Prof Emmanuel Dandaura, Ms Tracey Saunders

Indigenous People/Fragility/Healing
Dr Cheela Chilala, Dr Heather Fitzsimmons Frey, Ms Penelope Youngleson, Ms Kristina Johnstone

Focus Day Theatre for Social Change

Guga S’thebe Cultural Hub / Guga S’thebe: Telling it like it is
Brings to the audience and delegates an opportunity to listen to the voices of children and take action. This focus day venue asks us to see what children see, affording us the possibility of a divine appointment with children. Drama for Life young members led plenary session and activities throughout the day.
Focus Day Theatre as Education

Exploring the ways theatre can be in and of itself educational – through defining a broader concept for what we mean by ‘education’ and by understanding theatre as a holistic practice which stimulates and engages multiple intelligences, providing a way into ‘learning how to learn’. It seeks to explore how this connects to more traditional theatre in education approaches.

Revitalizing ‘African’ traditional dances for young audiences through music videos [Tanzania]
All From One: Humanity’s Shared Origins – presentation and demonstration from PAST [SA, USA]
The importance of the arts for learning [SA, USA]
The arts and drama as an integrated mode of learning [SA, Iran, Aust]
Crossing the River – towards an emerging pedagogy for integrating arts and maths [Zimbabwe, SA]
Theatre in and as education [Demark, CR, India]

Presentations

ASSITEJ, Cape Town

A Mano, Baxter Theatre

Animal Farm, Artscape Theatre

Dear Mr Government, please may I have a meeting with you even though I’m six years old? Baxter Theatre

Gretel and Hansel, Baxter Theatre

Insta-Grammar, Guga S’Tshebe Cultural Hub

Karoo Moose, Artscape Theatre

Making Mandela, Guga S’Tshebe Cultural Hub

Our House, Guga S’Tshebe Cultural Hub

Patrice Balbina’s Chance Encounter with the end of the world, Artscape Theatre

Phefumla, Artscape Theatre

The Bookbinder, City Hall

The Dancing Beasts or the discreet spell of the wild, Artscape Piazza

The Underground Library, Artscape Theatre

Tiger Bay The Musical, Artscape Opera House

Us / Them, Artscape Theatre

When Lion Had Wings, Artscape Piazza

Young @ Home, City Hall
Imaginate, Edinburgh
The Queen has vanished, The Studio, Festival Theatre
Little Red, Traverse Theatre
Noseferatu, Traverse Theatre

Collegiate Consultations

UK / Scotland / Ireland

Oily Cart
[Tim Webb, Artistic Director]

Creative Scotland
[Colin Bradie, Programme Manager, Time to Shine, Lead Officer, Imaginate]

Dublin City University
[Sharon McArdle, Drama Education Lecturer, School of Arts Education & Movement]

Dundalk Youth Centre
[Kevin Moran, Manager]

An Táin Arts Centre
[Paul Hayes, CEO/Director]

MAD Youth Theatre
[Kwasie Boyce, Artistic Director & Founder]

Youth Theatre Ireland
[Rhona Dunnett, Research & Development Officer]

Charlton Park Academy
[Kathryn Stowell, Communications and other staff]

Arts Council UK
[Nicky Morgan, Senior Manager, Children, Young People and Learning & Sarah Fok, Artsmark]

Finland

Ung Dramatik Vid Unga Teatern
and ASSITEJ Finland
[Harriet Abrahamsson]

Cirko - Center for New Circus
[Jarrko Lehmus, Producer]

Youth Circus Association
[Petra Paivarinne]

Lycee franco-finladais d’Helsinki, Suomi
[Dr Kari Kivinen, Principal and other staff]

Department of Education, Finland
[Paula Lehtonen-Mauffret, Pedagogical Expert and Education Consultant]

Informal and spontaneous networking conversations with a range of artists at ASSITEJ from South Africa, Australia, Philippines, Mexico, New Zealand, Japan, USA, Spain ...
The exploration and research described here follows a path through themes rather than country-by-country or chronological in order to reflect the whole of learning experience that it was.

De-schooling Society by Ivan Illich was raised at ASSITEJ with the speaker asking “why we maintain a schooling model that we know does not work?” and observing that classrooms “centralize power and give no autonomy to the learner.” They went on to pitch an ideal setting in which learners can flourish. Schools would have autonomy and funding stability, and a strong sense of community with interpersonal relationship extended to families of learners. The learning focus would be on well being [mental, emotional, physical, spiritual], freedom [perceived and experienced], and a deep-rooted sense of personal value.

Finland would, in some ways, seem to take this on creating genuine learning environments focused on the complete development of the student.

Finland has 5.4M people, approximately 18 people/m², and Helsinki has 600K people. The education system operates with a number of core principles.

- Parents trust in teachers; teaching as a profession is highly respected.
- Every student has a right to be supported in learning and in personal development and welfare.
- Equal value is given to all aspects of individual growth and learning – personality, morality, and creativity.
- The social and emotional curriculum and the student welfare curriculum are both the same across Finland providing significant consistency
- Student development happens as a human being and as a citizen.

The 658 Sámi-speaking students have the right to be taught in their own language.

This is in direct contrast to the Australian experience which places the emphasis on learning in English. The Sámi have an articulated right to maintain and enhance their language and culture and so teaching of, and in, the Sámi language is seen as an integral part of cultural maintenance.

In Finland, education is described as objective focused not competency based. The focus is on the whole student and their personal development, supported by directive of after school time being for extra-curricular activities and personal development not homework.
One might assume that the education environment in Finland would reduce some of the pressures we see on young people, and this may be so. However the same issues were identified for Finnish young people as we see in our setting -

- youth suicide
- anxiety
- drugs [“we don’t talk about it”]
- bullying [national response]

Finland supports local municipalities making their own Cultural Education Plan that responds to the local setting. It reflects the local cultural nuances and supports local artists. The cultural plan is seen as a mechanism to support all children and young people having equal access to arts and cultural activity. The cultural plan is a collaboration between arts and cultural, and education sectors as well as schools and local artists.

The Cultural Education Plan aligns strongly with Corrugated Iron’s approach to its Creative Schools and Communities Program. Both enable:-

- greater access to arts and culture;
- a mechanism to increase the education experience;
- a device to support curriculum goals

The strength of the Finnish education is helped by principals having autonomy [and this is supported by the high regard in which educators are viewed]. Lycee franco-finlandais d’Helsinki, Suomi describes itself as delivering multi-literacy, critical thinking and citizenship education. The principal described the Finnish education system as “objective focused not competency based” and talked about ambitious evaluation supported by students [and parents] knowing what is expected and students understanding they are on a journey from A to B. The Finnish curricula was described as good for skills for life; and pragmatic learning.

Specific examples of principal’s agency of education provided include:-

- Student Representative Council identifying themes for learning that are tackled across the learning disciplines for example, light, which is then explored in a science/physics setting one way, a visual art class another and so on.
- Alumni Day – 130 mentors return annually and inspire students, offer examples of career pathways, training etc. This has cultivated strong school culture that extends beyond the school years and keen participation from alumni some of whom become mentors for students.
- Role play village day which sees students test driving real life taking on civic and work roles within the community offering life skills and practical insights.

It appears that arts programs coming into schools are, like in Australia, at the discretion of the school and may be prompted by educators or artists. Though the Cultural Education Plan does provide a strong provocation and delivery framework for this to occur.

Across all discussions about arts programs in schools, this discretionary approach seems to be prevalent, including the UK. In the UK, there is less sense of the consistent approach seen in Finland. In some ways this is no surprise given the UK has more than ten times the population of Finland with far greater population diversity. These factors alone mean a different education landscape.

My experience through Corrugated Iron is that a schools enthusiasm for engaging with artistic programs, whether linked to curriculum areas or creative projects for their own sake, is determined by school personnel especially the principal. School personnel will opt in because already ‘get the arts’ or they see the potential for the proposal to have impact on their students. This was confirmed as a global experience in all my discussions.
There is a direct correlation between school personnel’s understanding of the positive impact of the creative process and their enthusiasm and adventurous approach to using the arts as a mechanism to achieve a range of outcomes was also confirmed by others.

The intersection of theatre and education was interrogated. An identified challenge is that many educators have a limited experience of theatre and therefore a narrow definition of what theatre or drama is and how it can be used. Both story drama and process drama need to be demonstrated to educators.

**Educator and Artist collaboration**

This was a hot topic ranging from artists working with teachers in training, and learning exchange between artists and educators through to residencies in schools.

For Dublin City University, there was acknowledgement that the teacher artist partnership is very high on the agenda in Ireland with the ‘arts in education portal’ and Creative Ireland program that was launched in October 2016. For DCU, this is realised through an increase in the arts training and experiences provided to teachers in training.

In a project profiled at ASSITEJ, artists worked with trainee teachers on developing a kit bag of drama activities that do not require many resources. It was a positive experience designed to let trainee teachers see first hand the power of creative play and the freedom that can come with such an approach. Some of the trainee teachers still wanted a list of dos and don’ts, and a few said they would probably never use the skills or activities. And then there was the gold from one of the trainee teachers.

“I learned about creative play but also learned that I am a creative person.”

Best practice sees an exchange between artist facilitators and educators where the educators learn about the arts process and the artists gain understanding about the curriculum. This is capacity building in both parties. One example cited stated that 98% of teachers had no training in the arts within curriculum. In the Australian context we know the training in the arts curriculum is not substantial.

Further, there is a lack of guidance provided to teachers and so they may lack the capacity to have creative ideas. The fallback position for teachers is often remembered activities from their own youth and is therefore still instructed and managed.

There was quite a bit of discussion about the potential for artists to work with teachers and build this capacity but that sometimes the artist in the classroom enables the teacher to
focus on something else and so the capacity building does not happen. When it does occur it is rewarding and lifts the project. It also supports the educators continuing professional learning and tops up their tool kit.

Young people develop and demonstrate skills through the creative process that their teachers say they have never seen.

Children’s Theatre Project from Tanzania is not only building artistic capacity and appreciation but is also setting a space where young people can ask questions and, with teachers, have rich discussions.

Artists install themselves in a shed in a schoolyard and begin a gentle interaction with students. The artists are privy to information not shared in the classroom, useful for understanding student perspectives.

Oily Cart, in the UK, has taken the residency concept one step further by taking over a building in a school on a permanent basis. This immerses them in the environment of their audience. Oily Cart turns traditional theatre on its head creating “innovative, multi-sensory and highly interactive productions for the very young and for young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.”

The founding Artistic Director, who still leads the company, talks eloquently about the company finding its point of difference and strength and remaining focussed on this. Their productions use multi-sensory techniques and non-traditional space such as hydro-therapy pools and trampolines to create unique theatre. With more than three decades of learning and experience, they are the experts in their field.

It is essential to give young people ownership and agency of the learning. An example is a young person is asked to step into a role and responds in a different way taking the character somewhere else. This fosters critical thinking, divergent thinking and builds a sense of community. The learner’s interest must be central.

During apartheid, evolution was banned from being taught. PAST is a theatre/science collaboration designed to teach evolution and humanity’s shared origins. The work is a physical theatre presentation so not constrained by language etc. Great example of theatre being used to educate about another discipline. Despite there being no scientific weight for it, there is a persistent belief, in some places, that black Africans have not evolved and therefore have not developed; they have less capacity. The PAST project is dispelling this myth through the science using theatre.
Common stories & alignment

I talk a lot about participation in youth theatre being about developing strong community members; we know only a small number of our participants will pursue an artistic career but we aim to instill a life long appreciation of the arts in all of them and we help forge wonderful human beings.

I found alignment with companies such as Grasshopper Youth Theatre [Greece] who believe that within a society the most essential form of intervention is to awaken the imagination and infuse empathy in young adults and future citizens.

Other discussions identified drama as:-

- Connecting us to humanity
- Enlarging ones world view by giving capacity for two perspectives at the same time
- Helping us to imagine solutions, reemerge for life, connects us to our roots
- Provoking critical thinking and creative problem solving, developing cognitive creativity, social interaction, verbal reasoning
- Offering a rich opportunity for cross-curricular learning
- Encouraging self-discovery and self-reflection

At ASSITEJ the discussion about education mostly came from artists considering how they contribute to education through building educators’ capacity, delivering arts programs in education settings and the value add of the arts into the education space.

A global conversation, there was strong representation from across the African continent and I hoped to draw some parallels to the Northern Territory context. There were many examples provided of cultural grounding being provided through theatre in education projects.

In the discussion, Multidisciplinary theatre: fostering intercultural tolerance & educational reforms in Ghana & beyond, Dr Ekua Ekumah talked about projects needing to be rooted in the cultural setting but relevant for young people in contemporary life, online for example. Projects need to be both enjoyable and functional, universal and culturally localised.

Drama for Life, a Johannesburg-based organisation – had a huge presence at ASSITEJ. Developed in response to the dislocation of young people from the townships and the migratory experience, they use the elements of fire/water/earth and ritual to build a distinctive aesthetic. The result, seen at ASSITEJ, are young people taking leadership [they hosted a number of activities and events over the conference] and devising work [Please Mr Government].

A Mexican project was presented where a space has been created for young people [who have parents/family members that have disappeared] to gather. The loss the young people are dealing with is about both the loss of the parent and the loss of their own childhood as a result. The discussion considered whether they are rehearsing for change or staying with the brokenness and what happens when we [the artists] are not there to support and track the long-term impacts. This is a continual question in our context.

In the community engagement space we like to claim that we are lifting the community, giving the marginalised a voice and providing positive role models. And we do! Colleagues have examples of changing lives through youth arts programs. But there is a tension with the helicopter approach [dropping in for one-off and short visits], and the artists not always
sharing the lived experience with the young people they work with [particularly evident when working people of a different cultural background]. Alongside this, was much discussion about theatre and theatre for development being fraught with colonial overtones, a common conversation in the Australian context as well.

In Ireland I discovered a strength in the creation of community anchored projects with young people at the centre that are run annually and tell local stories. The projects inform young people [and the broader audience] about important local history, build community cohesion, and inspire creativity in the participants.

M.A.D. Youth Theatre is not unlike Corrugated Iron. M.A.D. works with young people, providing drama workshops, creative arts experiences, and investing in an ensemble creating work and collaborating with other youth theatre companies. Each year M.A.D. tours into schools and develops performances about local folk lore leading into significant community events.

The Dundalk Youth Centre has a fantastic space that welcomes young people and is easy to get to. Once inside, young people find an area to relax and connect, training spaces and recording studios, and rooms for consultation. They have created a performance space in the garden, and have a long-term collaboration running with M.A.D. Youth Theatre. This means they are also actively involved in youth led community arts projects. In fact their vision for young people is to have them realise their identity through creativity. [This is a significant contrast to my experience in Australia where youth centres have a dominant sport and rec focus.]

The An Táin Arts Centre is an arts space in Dundalk with a large theatre, smaller studio theatre and gallery. The Centre produced a community theatre presentation that told the history of the area making use of every corner of the venue including stairwells and the board conference room. I was walked through the project and, through this, saw an inspiring approach to ensuring an independent arts space was adventurous in how it engaged with the local community in participatory events. Not only does this approach entice people through the door, it forges partnerships between organisations and agencies.

These three bodies resonated strongly with me. All are community strengthening and focused on participation. Right up my alley! The importance placed on collaboration and partnerships was evident and so crucial in long-term sustainability and impact.

In Finland I connected with theatre makers and circus organisations learning about their sector and seeing a showing of a new independent circus work in development.

Ung Dramatik Unga Teatern [Young Drama Young Theatre] provides a collaborative space for children and theatre makers. Programs include work in schools, projects with refugee communities, and the creation of new work. Ung Dramatik creates a number of new plays for children and young people each year with the scripts being drawn directly from a collaborative devising process involving young people.

Cirko – Centre for New Circus invests in the circus sector presenting work and providing training, rehearsal and performance spaces for companies, independent and emerging circus artists. I attended showing of a new work and was given a tour of the facility. At the end of the showing there was a QandA with the artists. This has inspired me to create a space for works in progress at Corrugated Iron for young and emerging artists. Cirko host an annual festival of contemporary circus and so has its finger on the pulse of contemporary circus.
The Finnish Youth Circus Association represents 42 circus schools across Finland and is a founding member of the European Youth Circus Association. Promoting youth circus is its core business and it does through supporting the network with professional learning and training opportunities and resources [which I invested in], sharing news and bringing members together for events and training. We discussed circus activity in schools, train the trainer challenges and pathways, and the Australian youth circus network’s manifesto.

A focus for the association is the professionalisation of youth circus companies. Central to this is to build circus trainers’ understanding and capacity around social circus; that is where circus is used as a tool for social inclusion and engagement and that the benefits extend beyond the circus tricks. It extends the circus trainer into the role of artsworker. This is a substantial part of Corrugated Iron’s circus program.

Strategic investment

Time to Shine is Creative Scotland’s national youth arts strategy. It sets out a ten-year vision to enable Scotland’s children and young people to flourish and achieve in and through the arts and creativity.

The implementation of Time to Shine commenced in April 2014 and concluded in March 2017. The main focus of this implementation programme was the distribution of funding of just under £4.5m to support a broad range of activity. A number of arts partners took the lead and ran arts hubs, receiving funding for a limited period. The projects were designed to engage young people in ‘relevant’ artforms for example street artforms and digital art. To an extent the strategy became about the funded and continuation of the programs beyond the funding cycle has relied solely on those entities finding the resources and impetus to do so.

Creative Scotland has established a young people’s advisory group. They have a nurturing fund they administer, and run an event called The Uncon – “Unconvention”. This event is youth-led and assembles young people and artists alongside agencies, schools and youth workers to highlight and celebrate youth arts and its crucial role in the lives of young people. The youth sector values this but I wonder if it helps provoke and maintain youth arts activity levels.

Youth Theatre Ireland supports youth theatre in practice through an annual programme that includes the National Youth Theatre, the National Festival of Youth Theatres, training and mentorships, commissioning new writing, publications, resources and other services as well as research and policy development. They work in partnership with local and national
stakeholders towards the sustained development of youth theatre, advocate the benefits of youth theatre participation and provide leadership for the sector.

There are about 55 companies producing work for young audiences and more companies emerging. The Arts Council has focused on arts with young people and arts in education; a relatively new strategy is an informal arts and education charter.

Youth Theatre Ireland has drawn on the experience of peers at Creative Scotland to support the development of their strategies, and has a rich investment programme that spans first exposure to theatre through to developing critics and training for facilitators.

- National Youth Theatre [Ireland], six week intensive, ensemble cast drawn from member companies come together and create a show working with a professional production team.
- Young critics – a team of 16 young people attend workshops on how to critique theatre, attend shows and then participate in discussion panels. Outcome – young people broadened appreciation for theatre and aesthetic of theatre.
- Youth Theatre Festival – companies bring young people to an extensive skills development and collaboration on a large scale.
- Extensive resources and mentoring that support emerging companies and independents working in youth theatre.

I came away with a strong sense that Youth Theatre Ireland is a comprehensive programme focused on long-term sustainable development of a rich youth theatre ecology.

The Arts Council England is committed to maximising access to arts and culture, through development, funding and advocacy. It has a specific goal for children and young people to have access to creative experiences, and at the other end, focuses on skills progression and transition into the creative industries. The Arts Council has the Cultural Education Challenge which calls for a collaboration between arts and education to provide quality arts education for all young people through a number of initiatives.

Artsmark awards schools for their arts and culture programmes. There is a tiered approach recognising getting started, up and running, and advocating to others about the value. Outcomes include peer-to-peer learning, teacher confidence and enjoyment, student voice, and these are evaluated over two years. There 2,800 Artsmark Schools supported by principals and governed by teachers, with parent engagement.

The Arts Council is developing a 25 year talent plan that will begin with early years and pedagogical focus and support young people to ‘find their talent’, test driving five different arts and cultural activities each week.

**Children and young people as citizens**

I was reminded not to shy away from displaying a child’s world as complex. Children and young people love and respect this complexity, and respond to it. This applies to participatory activities as well as productions.

*Little Red* and *Noseferatu*, both part of Imaginate, were dark tales. *Us/Them* at ASSITEJ told the true story of terrorists taking a school population hostage in Beslan in 2004 and examines this terrible experience from young people’s viewpoint. Other shows exemplified include *Little Red Eve* that has same visuals but the adult and young audiences have different voice over narrative, and the Swedish production *Lille Kung Mattias*, that has the
Boy King sacking his dictating advisors and then appointing children from the audience to take on portfolios and advise the King.

The nature of participatory democratic engagement means young people define their own well-being rather than having it externally imposed through socio-economic lens. Young people have regulated lives but no voice. They receive no skills training in participatory democracy. Changing this strengthens communities and fosters self-reflection and civic engagement.

Discussion about wearing of costumes as an exploration of ‘costumes’ we wear in real life aligns strongly with Corrugated Iron’s research where alumni talked about trying on “different skins”. In our research this articulation identifies that the ‘costumes’ or ‘skins’ enable the wearer to view the world from a different lens, and this develops empathy, a crucial element in human development.

Evaluation

This excursion to children’s theatre festivals and their accompanying conference programs, and meetings with Arts Councils, educators and artists provided a rich experience that has both inspired my vision for the future of education and confirmed that, globally, there are more similarities than differences.

There is consistent articulation about the power of the arts.

**The arts support young people to engage with learning, and divergent thinking.** The arts encourage young people to be critical thinkers, flexible and adaptive as they prepare for complex futures.

There are many examples of arts programs embedded in schools that enable deeper engagement with learners, and arts practice and artists engaging with teachers in terms of building relationships and expanding perspectives.

An independent or alternative concept of literacy stems from young people engaging with creative processes. This statement resonated strongly with me. As discussed elsewhere I have a keen interest in all learners having the opportunity for success and celebration whilst at school, and for many, the arts provides this avenue.

**Teachers and learners need to be divergent thinkers, and artists can support this.**
All the conversations acknowledge extensive expertise in education but it is a system that struggles to support divergent teaching practice. Bringing arts programs into the education space, we need to be mindful of stepping into a system but let us take advantage of the fact that the arts offers *a point of resistance and *another perspective to and within the curriculum.

Students need *means, *reason and *opportunity. Such a simple concept but one that can bypass students with communication challenges or different learning styles, those already behind peers developmentally, or who have additional hurdles in their lives. Artists can, and do, play a constructive role in providing the bridge between the conventional education system and a divergent operating space.

The more we can trial activity, demonstrate the evidence of impact, and share the story, the more we will see the arts treated as a genuine and integral part of education that uniquely straddles:–

• being for its own sake,
• complementing other learning areas, and
• supporting personal growth and development.

It is easy to think of ones own environment or experience being unique. This research confirmed that the Northern Territory does face some unique challenges but we are part of a global story. Because of our size and intimate community, we are well placed to be adventurous in tackling our education challenges.

Despite extraordinary examples of arts programs having significant impact on learners and schools, in the broader context of education, the arts remain optional and not part of the core STEM focus. The arts are viewed as a fix-it but expendable as an essential experience and our challenge is to shift this view.

**The arts are generally not valued in context of career planning.**

The arts are the first to get cut is a consistent experience. They are seen as extraneous despite the demonstrable impact and the regularity with which they are brought out to solve a problem!

**In times of crisis, theatre enables hope!**

This expendability is underpinned by how the arts are viewed beyond the arts and cultural sector. Despite having close allies in education, health and tourism, there was a consistent response to the question of whether the whole of government embraces the arts? “Not really!”

Children’s playwright Suzanne Le Beau, who is “one of the most important voices in dramatic art for youthful audiences at the international level,” reminds us not “to simplify or explain” when creating work for children. Children are free of feelings of inferiority although they grow into this realisation when young. Our challenge is to raise everybody up to reduce the discrepancies in inequality. I took away three observations made by Le Beau at ASSITEJ.

“The teacher’s duty is to wake the child up through play and transformation.”

“Teaching is also about the teacher learning.”

“Teachers should become lighter in spirit through teaching.”
Implementation & Sharing

Implementing and sharing the learnings from this research fellowship will happen over the next 18 months.

Teacher Professional Development Day [July 2017]
Ludmilla Primary School
Elspeth Hurse and I presented an early reflection on our learnings, both individual and collective.

Festival of Teaching [Aug 2017]
Presented a session Power of the Arts – Inspiring the next generation of creative thinkers hosted by the Arts Educators of the Northern Territory. Co-presented with Elspeth Hurse. We presented an overview of our reflections including models and examples that we think can be useful for the education challenges faced by the Northern Territory. We sought interest from those in attendance and will continue conversations in 2018.

Corrugated Iron Staff [Sep 2017]
Presented an overview of the fellowship learnings with a focus on:
* potential linkages with youth theatre companies for exchange
* scripts for works that could inspire young audiences
* learnings to influence Corrugated Iron’s Creative Schools Program

Youth Sector Strategic Working Group [Sep 2017]
Presentation of overview of learnings from the Fellowship to Youth Sector Representatives with emphasis on school observations and discussions at government level about investment in young people.

NT Department of Education Strategic Planning Session [Oct 2017]
Shared learnings within this workshop-style strategic planning session.

NT Chapter, Churchill Fellows [Nov 2017]
Presentation of my fellowship.

Creative Teaching Approach [ongoing]
This fellowship has directly influenced a new program at Corrugated Iron. The Creative Teaching Approach [CTA] is, at this stage, a pilot program developed to provide a professional learning program for teachers who see the potential for using creative and practical strategies to increase student engagement, motivation and achievement. CTA brings a drama pedagogy into the classroom driven by a teaching-artist in collaboration with the teacher. Three schools have had the concept pitched to them; all are keen. The pilot is being delivered in one

Sector Network Sharing – informal [ongoing]
Including Australian Theatre Forum [Oct 2017], Youth Sector Gathering [Oct 2017], MAP2018 [April 2018] – all opportunities to share learnings with colleagues are taken advantage of.

Alongside these directed implementations and sharing are a number of ongoing and future strategies including:-

* continuing reflection of Corrugated Iron’s Creative Schools Program [currently being delivered in about 20 schools across the Top End of the Northern Territory] and examining ways to incorporate my learnings with these education partners and build the case for extending the investment in this program; and
* pursuing mechanisms to share the learnings about strategic government initiatives focused on young people with other agencies at a strategic level.

I have become a big advocate for Churchill Fellowships, encouraging new applicants and supporting peers through the application process. I have joined the NT Chapter of Churchill Fellows and expect that this will help provoke extending sharing opportunities. I look forward to being able to update the Churchill Trust on further developments as they occur.