Social impact study of UK theatre

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Introduction

In 2001 Arts Council England, with the support of the Theatrical Management Association (TMA), Independent Theatre Council (ITC), Society of London Theatres (SOLT), the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Arts Council of Wales, the Scottish Arts Council, Equity, the Musicians' Union, the Writers' Guild, and the European Union Social Fund, commissioned Dominic Shellard of the University of Sheffield to conduct an economic and social impact study of UK theatre. The study of economic impact was published in 2004[1].

This research assesses theatre's social impact, within a framework which builds on the creative aims and analyses of theatre practitioners. It draws on examples of good practice and highlights the values and practical steps which underlie it.

The findings are based on a questionnaire, which was sent to 448 members of ITC, as well as an intensive examination – based on interviews and documents – of ten selected companies. Finally, four of these companies were visited; they form the case studies.

Key points

Ten social impact factors
The study identified ten factors which contribute to the social impacts of theatre. They represent a common ground between these theatres' underlying aims, namely, the use of theatre to achieve specific personal, communal or political purposes:

1. **Artistic excellence** – a common commitment to artistic excellence at all stages of the creative process

2. **Cultural partnerships** – one of the most important evaluative measures of theatre's social impact:
    - it reflects recognition by other professionals of the values theatre brings to the challenges of, for example, social exclusion, racism, and so on
    - it is an external endorsement of theatre, and can help extend its role in social and community development

3. **Access** – strategies to overcome social, political and economic barriers to participation

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[1] Shellard D, *Economic impact study of UK theatre,* Arts Council England, 2004

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4. **Participatory creative processes** – a creative dialogue between company and community, and between artists and participants and/or audiences

5. **Giving a public voice to marginalised experiences** – through development of new writing and innovations in participatory work with vulnerable and excluded groups

6. **Ethical practices** – a common commitment to ethical practices, such as a duty of care towards vulnerable participants and just and correct relations with all partners

7. **Evaluation** – a commitment to open and systematic evaluation, by everyone who contributes to the creative process, using a range of methods

8. **Training** – providing both informal training and development, and more formal pathways to paid and professional work

9. **Partner funding** – a significant indicator of the social impact of theatre:
   • represents financial investment by non-arts agencies in theatre
   • recognition that theatre helps funding agencies achieve their social objectives, such as reductions in youth offending, increased take-up of primary healthcare services, and so on

10. **Good governance** – reflected throughout a company's total processes – clear management and creative structures, respectful working relations and so on

These factors are described in more detail on pages 25-27.

Highlights of the findings
The research was based on a model of different types of social impact (see Methodology and Definitions, below). Highlights from the findings were as follows:

Practitioners had a clear understanding of their artistic aims and of the social intentions behind their work
   • Almost nine of out ten (88 per cent) of practitioners surveyed considered that theatre had a personal impact on participants
   • More than eight out of ten (82 per cent) of practitioners surveyed considered that theatre resulted in group impacts
   • Two thirds (65 per cent) of practitioners surveyed assessed theatre as having civic impacts
   • More than four out of ten (42 per cent) of practitioners surveyed believed that theatre has hard impacts

- Social impacts were found across a rich spectrum of activity, spanning both process-led and performance-centred work
- Stable funding was critical to social impact
- Further work was needed to define more clearly the types of impact identified through the survey

Context

In his book *What good are the arts?,* John Carey argues that the value of literature lies in its 'indistinctness', in the space that is left available for the reader's imagination[2]. If we were to attempt a similar definition for theatre, then we could say that the value of theatre lies in the idea of 'play'. It is the concept of 'play' which is common to all theatre, from a main-house production of the 'play' *King Lear*, through site-specific performance art, to the most basic of improvisations.

Theatre's social impacts derive from this complex 'playfulness', from the rich range of its forms, the many 'languages' with which it speaks to the imagination. It is this flexibility which allows us to use theatre to help address social problems, promote cross-cultural understanding or celebrate community life. This applies not only to a main-house production of new writing, but also to a community education programme on health issues, or workshops to address social exclusion.

Stella Barnes, of London's Oval House Arts and Education Centre, eloquently expressed the role of theatre in tackling the effects of social exclusion on young people when we interviewed her:

> 'All those kinds of things, playing, making stories, telling stories: they're essential, an essential part of our personal development and our cultural development and who we are and what makes us human. And enabling young people to find the ability to play is amazing regardless of any social outcome. I think theatre helps us know who we are by being someone else, and on that very essential personal level exploring who you are with people playing together is really extraordinarily powerful. '

This study draws on examples of good practice in order to set out in detail the social impacts that flow from these imaginative interventions, and to identify the values and practices which make them possible.

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[2] Carey J, *What good are the arts?,* Faber, 2005

Framing the research

Focus
The organisations which commissioned the research formed a steering group (see Appendix for a full list of members). The steering group agreed that any assessment of social impact ought to begin with the mapping of a theatre sector committed to social inclusion – the members of ITC[3]. And, crucially, there was a concern that in work of this kind, it is participants – the `audience' – who tend to be surveyed, rather than practitioners and institutions; outcomes are addressed rather than outputs, and intuition often replaces hard evidence. This study therefore offers a framework for understanding theatre's social impact which begins from the creative aims and analyses of theatre practitioners.

The legacy of previous studies
While this is the first study to examine the social impact specifically of theatre, it is only the latest in a range of often illuminating reports on the generic social impacts of the arts. In particular, it is indebted to the work of François Matarasso and Helen Jermyn.

Matarasso's groundbreaking study, *Use or ornament?* was the first to systematically set out the potential impacts of the arts in civic and social regeneration[4]. Jermyn refined this approach by developing a model which divided the social impacts of the arts into four categories: personal, group, `civic', and 'hard' impacts[5]. This study draws on both approaches in order to offer the first art-specific survey of social impact.

Thanks to ….
Finally, all social research owes the greatest debt to its subjects. Without the enriching work being carried out by theatres throughout the UK there would be no basis for a study of theatre's social impact. Without the reflections and analyses of practitioners, there would be no understandings to share.

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[3] ITC represents a wide range of performing arts organisations. Some reach audiences that have never experienced the live arts before, some work in specific communities or in social inclusion. 24% of the membership work specifically in the educational field reaching over 2 million children and young people.

[4] Matarasso F, *Use or ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts*, Comedia, 1997

[5] Jermyn H, 'Proposed evaluation framework', unpublished, cited in Michelle Reeves, *Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review*, Arts Council, 2001

Methodology

Phases of the research

In the first phase of the research we audited the independent theatre sector. A questionnaire was sent to 448 companies which were members of the ITC. They were asked to self-define the social impacts of their work against Jermyn's four categories for social impact.

In the light of the findings from this audit the steering group agreed the following three aims for the second phase of the study:

- to create a model for the social impact of theatre which offered a set of descriptors using Jermyn's four categories
- to face the challenge of 'replicability' by identifying the common factors which promote theatre's social impacts
- to contribute to the documentation and dissemination of good practice in the sector

Ten companies were chosen. They reflected the range and structure of ITC sector companies found in the audit, and offered a balance between performance-based and process-based work. The centrepiece of the survey methods was an extensive interview with each company, based on the original questionnaire. Companies were also asked for detailed documentation on their history, and on their current work. In addition, the work of four companies was chosen for more intensive investigation, including visits to performances and workshops. These form the basis for the case studies.

Definitions

Theatre
We are *homo ludens*: we use play, in all its rich complexity, in order to understand ourselves, to instruct, to move and to entertain. It is the concept of 'play' which defines all theatre, from a main house production of the 'play' *King Lear*, through site-specific performance art, to the most basic of workshop improvisations. The social impact of theatre derives from this complex 'playfulness', from the rich range of its forms and methods, the many 'languages' with which theatre speaks to the imagination.

Social impact
The study takes as its starting point the following definition of social impact as:

'those effects that go beyond the artefacts and the enactment of the event or performance itself and have a continuing influence upon, and directly touch, people's lives'[6].

Four categories of social impact
Jermyn developed a model containing four categories of social impacts of the arts: personal, group, `civic', and 'hard' impacts'[7]. The research identified 46 descriptors for the social impact of theatre. We placed each into one of Jermyn's four categories and used them to analyse the benefits of the work in the four case studies. The selection below helps to define them.

Some personal impacts
- pleasure from the experience of high-quality theatre
- value of being exposed to powerful dramatic narratives that stimulate and cause us to question/reflect/act
- the intrinsic pleasure and stimulus of play, of making new images of the world
- opportunity to transcend barriers of language by using the language of images and play to express experience

Some group impacts
- the collective value of involvement in a joyful, shared experience
- experiencing/using theatre as a shared resource of information and learning
- group opportunity, through the 'safety of fiction', to explore painful or difficult experiences safely
- contribution to sense of collective well-being, group and/or community identity and purpose

Some civic impacts
- increased community cohesion/cooperation through participation or witness
- civic celebration of the community's skill, imagination, creative power and commitment
- contribution to interagency work on social issues

Some hard impacts
- increased take-up of services, for example breast cancer screening, domestic violence support services
- employment of artists, writers, designers, and so on

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[6] Landry C, Bianchini F, Maguire M and Worpole K, *The social impact of the arts; a discussion document*, Comedia, 1993

[7] Jermyn H, 'Proposed evaluation framework', unpublished, cited in Michelle Reeves, *Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review*, Arts Council, 2001

- contribution to local economy through employment of carpenters, woodworkers, electricians, cloth-makers and so on
- general economic contribution to community through public performance

Companies which took part

The ten companies who took part in the second phase of the research were:

- *Action Transport*, Wirral, Merseyside: new writing theatre for young people
- *Crucible Theatre*, Sheffield, Yorkshire: producing house of Sheffield Theatres, The Crucible also carries out theatre in education programmes
- *Forest Forge*, Ringwood, Hampshire: rural community theatre
- *Ladder to the Moon,* Wandsworth, London: urban community theatre
- *Oval House Theatre*, Kennington, London: building-based theatre and arts education centre
- *Sole Purpose Productions*, Derry Londonderry, Northern Ireland: touring professional theatre company
- *Tamasha Theatre,* Southwark, London: middle-scale professional production and training company
- *Theatr na n'Og*, Neath, South Wales: theatre for children and young people
- *Women and Theatre*, Birmingham: community and educational theatre
- *Traverse Theatre*, Edinburgh, Scotland: new writing producing theatre

Case studies

Our model of social impact emerged from looking at particular programmes of work. This section looks in greater detail at some of that work, in order to offer a more detailed and specific account of theatre's social impacts.

Crucible Theatre, Sheffield: *Danny, king of the basement*

Creative context of performance/workshop
Written by Canadian writer David Craig, *Danny, king of the basement* was produced for 8–13-year-old pupils. It was jointly commissioned by Sheffield Theatres and M6 Theatre, and directed by Romy Baskerville.

The play explores crises of homelessness, family break-up and peer friendship through the experience of 11-year-old Danny, who lives with his recently separated mum.

It was not a participatory, workshop-based, programme. Instead, the production was supported by a sophisticated web resource for both teachers and children, which offered a wide range of ideas and methods for exploring the issues raised by the play[8]. In particular the web resource stressed the programme's potential value in work for key targets for National Curriculum Key Stages 3 and 4 in literacy, drama and PHSE (personal, health, and social education).

The production toured Sheffield's inner-city schools. Before the tour, teachers were invited to the Crucible to see the production. This gave the company a chance to explain their creative/social aims, and to introduce the resources. Performances were not seen as discrete events, however valuable, but as catalysts for creative social learning. At other points in the year, the theatre offers INSET training days, where teachers can learn basic theatre methods.

Social context
The researcher saw the play at Meynell Junior School, in Parson Cross. Parson Cross forms part of Europe's largest continuous council estate, with some 80,000 residents. In the wake of the closure of local steelworks in the last 20 years, the area suffers from a raft of social and economic problems, including high rates of mental illness among its young children.

Meynell Junior pupils include a significant minority for whom the issues raised by *Danny* are all too real. Poverty, malnourishment, inadequate or non-existent parenting, congenital ill-health, forms of familial abuse, and a lack of social and emotional nurturing can sometimes affect the children.

This is also a culture in which visits to live theatre are confined to the Christmas pantomime, if they happen at all. Theatre's immediate social impact in this context is simply to be *theatre*. The play was performed in the school hall to an audience of some 80 nine- and ten-year-olds; in their responses, the children showed a great fascination with the artistry of the playing, and the apparent mysteries of sound effects and transformable sets.

Review of the performance/workshop
The set showed a street front, with three doors, one leading to the basement where Danny will live with his mother, Louise. It is the latest of many 'homes' since his parents split up: they have been forced to leave each one when they could no longer pay the rent. His mother struggles to find work to pay for a decent home, and the play is about this, and about their search for stability.

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[8] This can be found at: www.sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/education/productions/danny.

Above the basement is Penelope's house. She comes from a middle-class family: her material affluence is contrasted with Danny's poverty. Her parents are separated, and argue all the time. Next door to Penelope lives Callum, whose father has recently lost his job. Whatever their differences, Penelope, Callum and Danny inhabit a world defined by change, family crisis, insecurity, emotional tension and powerlessness.

Danny takes refuge in his imagination, inhabiting a world peopled by secret agents and plots; he is a master of codes. Callum lives to play football, Penelope lives for ballet, and her mobile phones (one for each parent). The play tells the story of Danny's arrival on the street, his growing friendship with Callum and Penelope, and his mother's search for work. Among its themes is the idea that, in the end, children are their own best resource, in a world where adults so often fail to provide care or stability. It is through his friendships that Danny comes to understand himself and his situation.

These themes are explored in a series of cartoon-like scenes played out at home, in the street and in the schoolyard and classroom. The playing is physical and expressive within a simple but technically flexible set.

Some images from the play:
- The taxi ride using a simple cardboard cut-out car
- Danny
    - using an old pram base and bin as a secret spy centre
    - curled up outside his house, desperate with hunger
    - 'parenting' his mother as he tries to get her to manage her money better
    - freezing on the doorstep when his mum stays out late, and forgets to leave him a key
    - throwing his symbolic 'dad' into a bin
    - showing his humiliation over his inability to read
    - talking about his joy when Louise gets a job, and his fears that it will not last
- The children carefully negotiating their new relationships while trying to hide their problems
- Penelope tearfully putting her two mobiles together to force her parents to hear each other
- The loud roars each time Callum enters his home, to face an angry father
- Penelope and Callum 'operating' on Danny to remove the blocks that stop him learning and participating at school

Responses/evaluation of researcher and participants
The children were clearly transfixed by the play. The teacher commented on this later, noting that many find it difficult to concentrate, for a complex of reasons. They responded strongly to its *theatricality;* especially the mock operation on Danny, and the dad who is never seen but whose voice is a dinosaur-like roar, the mobile phones tied together by Penelope so that her parents could be forced to communicate – and so on.

It is also clear that the issues raised by the play resonated. The children spoken to by the researcher were enthusiastic, they 'loved it'. 'It were right funny and sad'; it 'makes you think a lot about things'; 'it were real'; were some of the comments they offered as they filed out to lunch.

In the brief question and answer session following the show most questions focused on their feelings: what was it like to be Danny; to be the mum; why did they have a dinosaur sound for the dad, and so on. There were also questions about the set, rehearsal and how the theatre was made.

Given theatre's empathetic power, not allowing more time afterwards for the children to reflect on these experiences might be questioned. This is where the theatre's careful preparation before the tour became critical. The teacher at Meynell was committed to the programme, and planned to pursue the issues raised, using the web resources. It can be argued that allowing the teachers to choose which issues to pursue and how, is correct, and respects their relationship to, and knowledge of, the children. Theatre's key role in these contexts is as a catalyst, offering concrete images and shared experiences for the development of personal and social learning.

Special features in relation to social impact
We can distinguish a number of specific factors in this programme which contribute to its social impact:
- relation between content and social context: the play was relevant to the direct or indirect experiences of many of the children
- the play was a means to bring to the fore children's often hidden or repressed experiences
- impact of the art of theatre in a culture in which `live drama' has little part
- focus on theatre values: on quality; on the resource materials
- support for the development of the creative arts in education: the 'magic' of the art; the use of theatre's symbolic and metaphorical power to explore difficult experiences in a safe and respectful way
- importance of the partnerships between the theatre and local schools, many of which are long-standing; this is critical to the theatre's social impact as a cultural intervention

- development of quality educational resources linked to teacher training. It is these which make possible the longer-term development work which underpin theatre's individual and group impacts. Among these are the opportunity for children to explore the feelings and ideas raised by the theatre
- transfer of drama skills to teachers both through INSET training and through the teachers' experimentation using the web resource

Potential social impacts of `Danny, king of the basement'
Some of these impacts assume follow-up work using the resources provided by the theatre. We have indicated these impacts with an * and indicated their source in either the performance or participatory workshops.

Personal impacts
- enjoyment [performance/workshop]
- stimulation of the imagination through exposure to magic of theatre and its possibilities [performance/workshop]
- extending our understanding through empathy [performance/workshop]
- increased understanding of ourselves in relation to others [performance/workshop]
- consolation of seeing the social nature of what are felt as 'individual' problems, such as homelessness [performance/workshop]
- greater understanding of social or personal issues [performance/workshop]
- learning through practical exploration of themes in workshops, and the application of 'knowledge in action' [workshop]*
- skills: basic theatre, arts, music, language [workshop]*
- feeling able to express and share experiences, and to have them validated and socialised [workshop]*

Group impacts
- fun and collective value of involvement in a joyful, shared experience [performance/workshop]
- enhanced awareness of, and commitment to, theatre [performance/workshop]
- enhanced interpersonal communication and ability to explore difficult experiences safely [performance/workshop]*
- shared appreciation of and skills in theatre through group creation, devising, improvising [workshop]*
- enhanced ability to give and receive ideas and work together towards shared objectives [workshop]*
- generic life skills such as debating, creating, analysing, researching etc around themes [workshop]*

- respect for each other's abilities, for differences, empathy for each other [workshop]*

Civic impacts (all these impacts derive from the performance)
- collective celebration
- public validation of repressed, marginal or hidden experiences/histories
- civic assertion of the importance of the personal and social development of our children
- civic celebration, and endorsement, of the imagination, of art, of theatre
- public expression of partnership, of the relation between the arts and education

Hard impacts
- contribution to better educational performance through gains in interest, self-confidence [performance/workshop]*
- contribution to increased well-being/health of children [performance/workshop]*
- contribution to a school's overall achievement [workshop]*
- knowledge exchange between professionals [performance/workshop]
- economic impact through employment of directors, artist, writers, performers, stage managers [performance/workshop]

Women and Theatre, Birmingham: *Yellow brick road*

Creative context
The *Yellow brick road* programme was created to:
- meet the needs of year 10 students who are 'academically underachieving or have low self-esteem or have an interest in the arts but are not succeeding in that area'
- allow participants to explore 'pre-conceived ideas of race, identity, creativity and the arts'
- introduce participants to the idea that the creative arts can be a career for anyone 'regardless of their cultural, social and economic background'
- give participants a flavour of the arts industries

Yellow brick road was a day-long event. The young people were taken on a tour of real and 'theatrical' working environments, which led to follow-up workshops.

Social context
The researcher observed the workshops in the Custard Factory, Birmingham's remarkable creative arts complex, which includes a café, galleries and working and

performing spaces. The participants, 16 young men, were from an inner-city school, and had been selected by teachers for the programme.

Narrative
The programme entailed four interrelated activities:
- opening workshop on urban art
- visit to examples of creative industries
- visit to the 'Bosnian artist'
- arts workshops and information session

Opening workshop
In a small gallery at the base of the Custard Factory three 'artists' introduce themselves. They say that they are members of the Urban Expression collective. Do we know what urban arts are? They elicit some responses and move towards a loose definition.

We are broken into small groups and each is assigned to an 'artist' to see some examples of artists' work. The video artist, Leo, shows us a small video sequence on a laptop depicting a narrative of a life-changing decision to leave home. We are then invited to discuss: `why did he leave? what happened to him?'.

The images and music are striking and the group are interested. Between them they piece together the story of a disaffected young black British man who has found in art a way to express and make public his experiences.

In turn, we visit the other Urban Expression artists, one a photographer, the other a dancer, a slight woman whose piece is the most enigmatic, 'difficult', and compelling of the three. We come together to reflect. What had the experiences told us about urban art and about art as a way to express our view of the world?

We are told that there are other people in the building who have chosen to use the arts as a career, not all of whom came through formal pathways.

Visit to creative industries
In small groups we now visit a selection of the small workshops/studios in the Custard Factory. In a music studio is Jez, a musician and composer, who left school without much idea of what he wanted to do. He does commissions, he records bands, and he does community- and school-based workshops with young people like them. He answers questions before showing them the equipment and talking about his business.

The visit to the `Bosnian artist'

After a short break we are given a commission. The Urban Expression collective selects its artists according to a set of criteria, which include a demand that the art be 'urban', that it has 'quality', and that it deals with relevant/important experiences. We are being asked to help assess an applicant.

We are taken out of the building, across to a battered door, in what seems to be a continuous wall. The facilitator knocks; the artist is living in this building, and is sensitive about his status. After a wait a man opens the door: we can come in but must be quiet because the artist is working. We enter a large run-down room. In one corner is a bed and a table with a few possessions. On the wall there are two family photographs and a small image of a national flag.

We are asked what we can deduce about the person who lives here? Desperation? Poverty? Fear? A foreigner? Family is important to them? As we talk a man appears from a strange red dome-like tent in the furthest section of the room. He speaks, but it is a Balkan language. Some of the young people laugh; some are embarrassed or confused. The facilitator tries to interpret, or to get us to interpret what is being said. The man points to objects and photographs. When he realises we do not speak the language, he addresses us in heavily inflected English. We are welcome to look at his art.

He invites us to his workroom – the red tent – into which we now crowd. The performance space is tiny. The `artist' tells us he is an exile from the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. He saw family members shot and killed or disappeared. He wants people to understand the suffering caused by the conflict, and so he has painted his experiences. He shows his paintings, which are deliberately naïve, but lacking any special aesthetic quality. These will be, he hopes, his passport into Urban Expression.

During this narrative some of the participants become extremely uncomfortable. He is too close to them: his heavy accent, and their confusion about how 'real' he is, causes them to murmur to each other, or to laugh defensively. The actor deals consummately with this by acknowledging their discomfort, focusing on them, and pushing on with his tale.

The group are challenged to set the importance of his experiences against the pressures of a creative business. Will these paintings get him access to Urban Expression? Does art have to be good to be important? Who decides what good art is in any case? What is our obligation to him as a refugee and exile, as opposed to our feelings for him as an artist?

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He wishes us goodbye, and we leave. We are led to a door next to the tent, which leads straight back into the gallery. The 'journey' had created the illusion of a separate space and reality. As a performance, it had been remarkably convincing. The combination of cultural barriers, the closed red space, and the harrowing narrative were powerful and extremely theatrical.

The workshops
The researcher could not attend the arts workshops, in which group took part. They were given a talk and information on arts careers. They also decided, by a narrow majority, not to admit the exile into the Urban Expression collective.

Special features in relation to social impact
Several specific factors in the programme contributed to its social impact:
- the strong partnership with the participating schools
- the quality of the actor `artists'
- the powerful challenge to their views on exiles and refugees in a context in which they were given power over a critical [if fictional] decision
- the demystification of 'art'
- the rich range of performance methods and learning structures employed
- the mix of experiential learning and factual knowledge offered
- the use of a creative industry site, making an immediate connection between the 'fiction' and reality of urban artists
- the belief in them, and in their potential, which is implicit in the whole programme

Potential social impacts of `Yellow brick road'
Personal impacts
- enjoyment
- stimulation of imagination
- exposure to the magic of theatre and its possibilities
- increased awareness of differences between art forms, and how these can be used
- awareness of social and cultural difference, and enhanced empathy for ways of life other than our own
- increased understanding of society and of the social source of individual problems
- enhanced knowledge of specific issues, for example, the war in the Balkans and its consequences
- learning through practical exploration of themes in workshops, and the application of 'knowledge in action'
- skills: basic theatre, arts, music, language and so on, gained in workshops
- encouragement of artistic interests and knowledge of creative industries
- enhanced self-confidence through participation in workshops

- greater potential enjoyment of, and commitment to, areas of learning

Group impacts
- fun and collective value of involvement in a shared experience
- enhanced awareness of arts of theatre, film, music and dance
- shared resource of information and learning
- shared language, and body of experiences to help develop personal and social skills
- enhanced ability to work together towards shared objectives
- skill in making and playing with images of reality
- raised confidence in the group as a creative and educational resource in and for itself
- enhanced awareness of the collective nature of creativity/learning
- enhanced generic life skills such as debating, creating, analysing, researching around themes
- respect for each other's abilities, for differences, empathy for each other

Civic impacts
- public celebration of, and respect for, the diversity of different cultures
- public validation of repressed, marginal or hidden experiences/histories
- public assertion of importance of collective, social life and art
- support for group and community action to tackle shared problems
- civic celebration, and endorsement, of the imagination, of art, of theatre

Hard impacts
- improved attendance at school
- contribution to better educational performance through gains in interest, self-confidence
- increased well-being/health of students through personal and group impacts
- increased employment through employment of directors, artists, writers, performers, stage managers, management and so on
- economic contribution to community through public performance and spending

Sole Purpose Productions, Derry Londonderry, Northern Ireland: *Don't say a word*

Creative context
Don't say a word is a play about domestic violence, written and performed by Patricia Byrne, directed by Shauna Kelpie and produced by Jonathan Burgess. The production premiered in Derry in 2004, and toured successfully to community centres and women's groups. Performances were followed by panel discussions,

including representatives from local groups, Women's Aid, the Probation Services and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Domestic Violence Unit.

The aim of the production was to raise public consciousness about the issue of domestic violence, and offer 'hope and information' to women victims. Foyle Women's Aid reported an increase in contact from women following these performances. In Spring 2005 *Don't say a word* was revived for a Northern Ireland-wide tour.

Social context of performance/workshop
The researcher saw the production at Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre in Cookstown, County Tyrone. The centre is a modern complex, containing a library, gallery and 400-seat theatre – a panelled proscenium, with raked seating, and fitted lighting grid.

There were about 250 people present, ranging from teenagers to older adults, and including a significant minority of men. The show was sponsored by Amnesty International as part of an international campaign against domestic violence.

Narrative of the performance/discussion
The set which occupies the wide stage is minimal, comprising a bed, a wardrobe and a table with two chairs. They are all good quality, made of polished wood, and are lit in soft pastel colours. The effect is deliberate – one of the key aims of the play is to challenge the idea that domestic violence is sourced in poverty.

A solo piece, *Don't say a word* demands a virtuoso performance from actress Patricia Byrne as she moves between characters and settings. She constructs a coherent world in which her love affair becomes, by slow gradations, a source of increasing psychological and then physical abuse. There are very funny scenes, such as their first night together, with Byrne playing both roles under the duvet.

The comedy is used to accentuate the bleakness of her situation. The narrative is skilfully paced; there is a slow and credible undermining of her self-belief and power. The lover is bright, articulate, educated. She is intelligent, energetic, and talented. You wouldn't think either of them would be players in this type of drama. The play rejects easy stereotypes. In a series of vignettes their relationship is created and then destroyed. She becomes pregnant, but loses the child because of the violence. Her lover is a plausible abuser and his plausibility increases her isolation.

When she becomes aware that help is available through the local Women's Aid, she is able, at the end, to contemplate escape. However, when she returns home

to pick up her belongings, he persuades her to stay. It is only when she is hospitalised that she gets an Occupation Order to protect herself.

The fact that *Don't say a word* is a solo piece helps to make it an act of testimony – a narrative of survival, a source of hope.

Post-performance
At the end of the performance there was an interval before the panel session, chaired by the Amnesty representative, alongside actress Patricia Byrne, and spokespeople for Cookstown and Dungannon Women's Aid, the probation services, and the PSNI Domestic Violence Unit. The professional and volunteer workers were there to give advice and information.

Many of the comments and questions asked used the play as a reference point, for instance:

- A woman commented that she could imagine herself there. She felt building young women's self-esteem was the core in preventative work

- Another woman thought that the key to the play was its sense of normality – this is happening to people we know and see. Domestic violence is an abnormality, hidden below the surface, and the play has brought it to light

- Another asked for information: when was Women's Aid formed and what was its role? A representative explained

- Why was the play written? Patricia Byrne said that it was a response to a friend's experience. Her aim was to raise awareness and offer hope

- The police representative was asked about their power to deal with men who break restraining orders, and gave a detailed explanation of the law in that area

- A man asks whether violent men can change, and if we should have a domestic violence register similar to that used for sex offenders. The probation officer, while expressing the hope that men could change, said that such a register was being considered

- An older woman, welcoming the campaign, suggests more is done to tackle it at a younger age. The play, or another like it, could be used in schools

Responses/evaluation from the tour

> `Excellent. A great learning experience. The impact was powerful. The play was a good method of teaching people about the issue and getting the message across. The discussion was useful and revealing. Many thanks to all concerned.

> Pauline McLaughlin - Community Development Coordinator, Ballymagroarty and Hazelbank Community Partnership

> `I feel that *Don't say a word* was a very successful means of raising community awareness about the nature of domestic violence and the pervasiveness of it across social class. The play … helped to dispel any myths that the audience may have held towards this issue. I valued the opportunity to read the drafts of the scripts, and I feel that my views were taken on board. The Panel discussions were also a positive experience in reinforcing the issues illustrated in the play.'

> Terry Doherty, Area Manager, Probation Board for Northern Ireland

> `The play made me think about things that had happened to me that, on reflection, I realise perhaps I needed to face.'

> Audience member (refuge resident, Foyle Women's Aid.) Tullyalley Development Group

> `The play made me realise how lucky I was when I decided to leave my violent marriage. Unfortunately I didn't know then about Women's Aid.'

> Audience member, Cookstown

> `The play itself encapsulates quite a lot of the information and training that we would use. However, as it told the story of one woman and her abuse the impact was much more powerful than statistics could ever be. … A well-researched, written and produced play that was both sensitive to the issue but not afraid to tell it like it is.

> Marie Brown, Area Management Coordinator, Foyle Women's Aid

Special features in relation to social impact
We can distinguish a number of specific factors in this programme which contribute to its social impact:
- the high artistic and production values

- the fact that the theatre grew from, and returned to, the community whose concerns it reflected
- the use of theatre to give public voice to a hidden experience
- the role of partners/agencies in shaping the text and creating audiences
- the role of a spread of groups in post-production work and discussion (it is through these networks that theatre achieves its civic and hard impacts)
- the impressive size of the audience on a Sunday night in December: a testimony to organisation and the company's reputation
- the cross-section of audience members
- the way in which the play's images provided important reference points for the debate, and for a catalyst for the seeking and giving of information

Potential social impacts of `Don't say a word'

Personal impacts
- enjoyment from a shared experience of high-quality theatre
- first experience of theatre in any form[9]
- stimulation of the imagination
- extending understanding through empathy
- empowerment of seeing the social nature of what are felt as 'individual' problems
- public and safe validation of personal experiences through theatre
- understanding of social issues
- greater confidence in voicing feelings and sharing concerns
- improved knowledge of law on domestic violence and sources of help

Group impacts
- collective value of involvement in an empowering and shared experience
- creation of a shared resource of information and learning for the group and community
- increased group or community support for victims [performance/discussion]
- group action on domestic violence
- involvement in a cross-community/class problem that can help transcend barriers created by the conflict in Northern Ireland

Civic impacts
- public validation of a hidden experience [performance]
- public support for group and community action to tackle domestic violence
- contribution to inter-agency collaboration to tackle domestic violence
- contribution to public education on domestic violence, such as work of voluntary agencies

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[9] Based on responses to the company questionnaires.

- civic celebration of the imagination, of art, of theatre in 'illuminating social and public issues'
- stimulation of cross-community action
- contribution at local level to an international movement to eradicate domestic abuse

Hard impacts
- contribution to community action to tackle domestic violence
- contribution to strengthening partnerships between theatre, local communities and agencies in tackling domestic violence
- reported increased use of domestic violence support services
- the knowledge taken by individuals and groups on help and support for those suffering domestic violence
- employment of directors, artists, writers, performers, stage managers, management and so on
- economic contribution to community through public performance and spending

Theatre na n'Og, Neath, south Wales: a profile

As well as detailed analysis of specific projects, the study also looked at the overall impact of a company's work.

Background
Theatr na n'Og is a bilingual company in Wales, which has been 'producing high quality theatre for young people in English and Welsh for over 20 years.' The company tours three TIE (theatre-in-education) programmes a year to schools in the region. A typical programme includes both performance- and process-based work, with productions usually based on local history, literature and mythology.

Theatr na n'Og does not do 'issue-based work', preferring to approach social problems, such as bullying, obliquely through dramatic narrative. In the current social and political climate, and in a region with a complex racial, ethnic and cultural mix, the company's bi-lingual work is viewed as a means to celebrate difference while asserting a 'shared humanity'.

At the core of the company's value system is a commitment to the highest possible aesthetic values in the service of educational aims. They use a professional reference group of teachers as a sounding board for all projects in order to ensure their value and relevance to schools.

Their work includes participatory programmes such as *Beyond words*. This offers comprehensive schools an imaginative way of introducing GCSE English set texts to Year 10 and 11 pupils, and is now in its third year. Focused on students who are 'reluctant learners', or likely to fail their GCSEs, the programme is structured around performed extracts from GCSE English set texts followed by short workshop activities which enable students to explore the texts, guided and supported by actors. Each class that took part in the project also received an education resource pack, compiled by secondary school English teachers.

Feedback from staff suggests that this combination of performance and simple workshop techniques brings personal social impacts, such as self-confidence and self-esteem, and renewed interest in, and commitment to, study.

Beyond words toured to 21 schools in three local authorities, with 1,260 children seeing the production and participating in interactive workshops.

Painting with light
The company also offers high-quality touring productions related to the National Curricula, and which can act as a stimulus for, or summation of, a term's work. For example, *Painting with light*, whose story is set out in company publicity as follows:

> 'Sara Jones' father has been arrested for taking part in the Rebecca Riots, and destroying a tollgate[10]. If found guilty he will be exiled to Tasmania and her family will be sent to the Poor House ... She runs away from home to confront the magistrate ... but when she arrives at his home is mistaken for one of his photographic assistants, and becomes involved in his pioneering experiments with photography.'

Painting with light was performed to more than 100 schools from Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and Bridgend at the Dylan Thomas Theatre in Swansea from September–December 2003. Teachers' feedback was enthusiastic:

> `A wonderful performance – it stimulated and captured the imaginations of my year 6 pupils.'
>
> Alltwen Primary School, Neath Port Talbot

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[10] The Rebecca Riots were a major disturbance in southwest Wales between 1839 and 1843. The main target of the rioters were the tollgates, which were attacked by men dressed in women's clothing.

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`As always brilliant performance by Theatr na n'Og.'

Ysgol Coed Hirwaun, Neath Port Talbot

Halt, who goes there!
This was a TIE project for Years 5 and 6 staged at the Dylan Thomas Theatre in Swansea from three months in 2004. During this long run, some 5,136 children from primary schools across Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend saw the production.

The play is set in Bridgend during World War II. On the night of 10–11 March 1945, 70 German prisoners of war (POWs) tunnelled to freedom from Camp 198 in Bridgend. It was the biggest escape attempt made by German POWs in Great Britain during that war. 'Armed with sticks and catapults, John and his friends set about capturing the escaped POWs. In fact the whole community join in the hunt, even the local Girl Guide troupe! However, the children discover a much darker secret.'

Social impacts in Theatr na n'Og's work
These are offered as potential impacts, although it is clear from the company's success, and the responses of audiences, participants and funders, that they are a fair representation of their achievement. Obviously, not all impacts are present at all times.

Personal impacts
- enjoyment from a shared experience of high quality theatre
- stimulation of the imagination through exposure to the magic of theatre and its possibilities
- awareness of cultural differences, and enhanced empathy for ways of life other than our own
- increased understanding of the social source of 'individual' problems
- heightened awareness of Welsh language and culture
- knowledge about local and national history
- learning through practical exploration of themes in workshops, and the application of 'knowledge in action'
- skills: basic theatre, arts, music, language and so on, gained in workshops
- enhanced self-confidence through participation in workshops
- validation of self through seeing one's views and ideas used and extended in collaboration with others
- greater enjoyment of, and commitment to, literature, history

Group impacts
- fun and collective value of involvement in a joyful, shared experience
- enhanced awareness of, and commitment to, theatre

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- enhanced interpersonal communication
- enhanced group learning based on the theatre, and resourced through a range of educational and art processes
- shared language and body of experiences to help develop personal and social skills
- shared appreciation of, and skills in, theatre through group creation, devising, improvising
- enhanced ability to work together towards shared objectives
- raised confidence in the group as a creative and educational resource in and for itself
- enhanced awareness of the collective nature of creativity/learning
- enhanced generic life skills such as debating, creating, analysing, researching around themes
- respect for each other's abilities

Civic impacts
- collective celebration in public spaces, schools, museums and theatres of Welsh language, culture and history
- public celebration of, and respect for, different cultures and histories
- public validation of marginal experiences/histories
- civic celebration of the importance of learning
- the bringing together of generations, ethnic communities, disabled and non-disabled people, and so on
- civic celebration, and endorsement, of the imagination, of art, of theatre

Hard impacts
- increased school attendance
- contribution to better educational performance through gains in interest, self-confidence
- contribution to a school's overall achievement
- increased employment through employment of directors, artists, writers, performers, stage managers, management and so on
- economic contribution to community through public performance and spending
- strong partnerships between the theatre and local schools

The process–performance spectrum

The research shows that the social impacts of theatre are spread across a process–performance continuum. While in practice there is often an overlap, certain impacts are only available within certain forms of theatre activity. For example:

Actor/participant workshop	Participant/witness workshop/performance	Witness/audience performance
Improved oracy gained through participation in drama	Theatre as means to explore social/communal issues, rehearse change, envision new approaches or ways to tackle old problems	Value of being exposed to powerful dramatic narratives that challenge, stimulate, and cause us to question/reflect/act

This has implications for how theatre is used to achieve specific social or educational goals.

The economics of social impact
In 2004 the *Economic impact study of UK theatre* established that UK theatre had a huge economic impact: it is worth £2.6 billion every year[11].

A formula needs to be devised which accounts for both:
- the economic impact of non venue-based theatre organisations
- the social impact work of all theatre organisations

This would undoubtedly reinforce the key recognition of the economic impact study, namely that the figure of £2.6 billion is an under-calculation of the overall economic impact of theatrical activity in the UK.

The factors that contribute to theatre's social impacts

We have been able to identify ten factors consistently underpinning the social impacts present in the work of the subject companies, whatever their specific differences in approach, form and context. We are not, however, arguing that *all* these factors must be present for theatre to have a social impact: simply that they

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[11] Shellard D, *Economic impact study of UK theatre*, Arts Council England, 2004

represent a common ground between these theatres, and are therefore significant. What defines the work of these theatres is *intent*: the proactive use of theatre to achieve specific personal, communal or political purposes.

Artistic excellence
There is a common commitment to artistic excellence at all stages of the creative process, from process-based participatory workshops to large-scale productions of new work.

Cultural partnerships
Companies work with a wide range of partners, including health authorities, local education authorities, community groups, community relations councils, rural development agencies, prison and probation services, and so on.

Partnerships are one of the most important social and economic evaluative measures of theatre's social impact. They reflect recognition by other professionals of the values theatre brings to the challenges of, for example, social exclusion, racism, and domestic violence. Successful partnerships act as a form of interagency advocacy for theatre, and can help extend its role in social and community development.

Access
Theatre's social impacts depend upon proactive strategies to overcome social, political and economic barriers to participation. These include socio-economic class, ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality, gender, age and geography.

Companies use a range of strategies to address these barriers. These include:
- touring to communities which lack theatre
- audience development strategies
- working in non-theatre contexts, for example, hospices, mental health units
- aligning the theatre with broad-based political movements combating social injustice, communal violence

Participatory creative processes
Participatory creative processes are critical to delivering theatre's civic and hard impacts. In the best of this work there is a creative dialogue between company and community, and between artists and participants. Ways in which companies have invited participation include:
- consultation about the issues the theatre might address
- active participation in the making of theatre
- backstage tours and talks
- community outreach as part of creative development work

Giving a public voice to marginalised experiences
As with access, marginality has multiple causes. Companies have addressed marginality in two important ways:

- through the proactive development of new writing in order to give public space and validation to previously marginalised voices and experiences
- by creating innovation in their participatory work with vulnerable and excluded groups

Ethical practices
The companies share a commitment to ethical practices. These include a commitment to freedom of expression; a duty of care towards vulnerable participants; just and correct relations with all partners; and financial probity in the use and distribution of public money.

Evaluation
There is extensive evaluation of the work described in the study, using a range of methods, from unstructured interviews to questionnaires. Companies share a commitment to open and systematic evaluation by all stakeholders in the creative process. Evaluation drives the development of new creative strategies, strengthens partnerships, and underpins a community's or a city's investment in theatre.

Training
In all companies there is a commitment to providing both informal training and development, and more formal pathways to paid and professional work. Training contributes to 'hard' impacts by directly generating employment, or by increasing the job prospects of an individual through offering specific and generic skills.

Partner funding
Partner funding is a significant indicator of the social impact of theatre. It constitutes a considerable economic investment by non-arts agencies in theatre. It is recognition of the values which theatre brings to the funding agencies' goals – from reductions in youth offending to increased take-up of primary health care services and from creative learning to stimulation of the rural economy.

Good governance
The organisation's success is founded on good governance, reflected throughout a company or theatre's total processes. It is demonstrated in clear management and creative structures, and in transparent and respectful working relations at all levels.

Conclusion

The hard evidence for the social impact of theatre lies in the billions of pounds contributed by theatre to the economy of the country. It lies in the large (but unmeasured) sums of money invested by a range of government and non-government agencies in theatre. It is reflected not only in the employment of theatre artists, managers, carpenters and so on, but also in the evidence, found in this study, of changes in behaviour or improvement in skills.

It is also reflected in the testimony of those who make and receive theatre. These include agency partners as well as artists, funding bodies as well as participants, actors as well as audiences. This study contains examples of such testimony. Too often this testimony is referred to dismissively as 'anecdotal', as if the detailed responses of women to, for example, *Don't say a word* (see page 19), were not in themselves sufficient evidence of its impact. On the contrary, this testimony is a critical measure of theatre's social impact. Rather than dismiss them, we need to develop more sensitive methods to help participants reflect on these complex experiences.

The last word goes to a practitioner, Dave Duggan of Sole Purpose Productions, whose definition of the theatre professional's role goes to the heart of this study:

> 'We're artists, we're theatre-makers. We're not social engineers or community development workers or so on. We're artists, and we bring imagination to bear to the issue of domestic violence, or policing in our society, and communal conflict or whatever it is. So the unique thing that the playwright brings to bear is imagination, and secondly it's theatre, because theatre is our most public art: it's where the issues of the day, from Greek Tragedy right up to now, are made present.'

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Appendix

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