



OUTREACH WITH TARGET-16 SCHOOLS

An evaluation of Theatre of Debate's 'People are Messy' production delivered in a selection of Target-16 schools in West Yorkshire



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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‘People are Messy’ is a new play by award winning playwright Judith Johnson whose previous Theatre of Debate plays include ‘Starfish’, ‘Nobody lives For Ever’ and ‘Every Breath’

‘People are Messy’ targets pupils aged 13 + and engages its audiences in an informed debate around PPI - patient and public involvement and the social and ethical issues that it raises.

This Theatre of Debate® programme is designed for a whole year group and consists of a stimulating performance and a thought-provoking, facilitated audience debate, enhanced by electronic voting technology. In addition, the project is supported by preparatory worksheets and follow up resources, available online.

‘People are Messy’ has been developed in partnership with the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Oxford Biomedical Research Centre (BRC), a partnership of OUH NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Oxford, as a Theatre production designed to support the achievement of attainment targets outlined in Key Stages 4 in Science, English, Drama, ICT, PSHE and Religious Studies.



Executive summary

INTRODUCTION

■ This report presents an impact evaluation of a set of outreach events in West Yorkshire schools that took place in March 2016. 'People are Messy' was devised, produced and delivered by Theatre of Debate with support from NIHR Oxford Biomedical Research Centre and a Wellcome Trust Strategic Award.

■ Collectively, in six state sector West Yorkshire schools, 'People are Messy' events were attended by over 1200 students and around 30 teachers. Four of the six schools were 'Target 16' schools, identified through the HEART partnership of 12 West Yorkshire higher education providers.

OUR APPROACH TO EVALUATION

■ Students completed a short single-sheet survey, side 'A' was completed prior to the performance, and following the performance and debate side 'B' was completed. The survey sought views on the performance, as well as attitudes towards study – and higher education in particular. The survey instrument also utilised the Research Toolkit Learning Gain© methodology to explore development or learning gain resulting from the experience.

TARGETING OUTREACH ON WIDENING PARTICIPATION STUDENTS

■ Part of our survey asked participating pupils to identify their home postcode, which enabled analysis by HEFCE's POLAR3 classification, as well as indices of deprivation (IMD) indicators issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

■ Almost all participants (97%) reside within postcode areas classified as belonging to POLAR3 quintile 1 to 3, with 44% residing in postcode areas identified as the most deprived (quintile 1 or 2). Mapping postcode data to IMD indicators (Chart 2) provides that 60% of participants reside within deciles 1 to 5, with 45% residing in postcode areas identified as the most deprived.

VIEWS ON UNIVERSITY STUDY

■ Almost three-quarters of participants had strong positive views on progressing to university before the performance and this strong intention was maintained following the performance.

REACTION TO THE PERFORMANCE FROM PARTICIPATING STUDENTS

■ Almost all participating pupils (82.5%) indicated that the performance was 'good' or 'very good'.

■ Some teachers told us that the performance enabled complex medical issues relating to ethics and research to be contextualised and discussed/debated in a non-threatening, informal and collaborative way. This added to the science provision delivered by schools and covered important curriculum areas.

LEARNING DEVELOPMENT OR GAIN FROM THE EXPERIENCE

■ In order to measure or assess learning gain of participating students we asked them to record their views in relation to a number of rating scale questions. We asked them to record their views prior to the performance, and then again following the debate. In almost all statement areas, looking at pre- and post-performance average scores, we found that the resulting differences were statistically significant.

■ The most visible 'gain' for participants post-performance was in the area of learning from actors and live theatre, a stronger belief that patients should help decide what medical research work is done, and that patients can be viewed as experts on their own illness. Less pronounced 'gains' were shown in relation to interest in how to do research and moving onto a career that involves going to university to pursue a programme of study linked to healthcare or medicine.

THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE

■ All of the teaching staff we spoke with following the performance provided positive comments on the overall experience. Comments focused on the professional approach taken by the production team and the clarity of messages within the story.

CONTENT OF THE PERFORMANCE

■ Feedback from teachers indicated that the dialogue and content of the play was at a level that was generally non-patronising and understandable to the audience (mainly 13-14 year olds).

■ Some teachers commented that the detail relating to medical research work was difficult for some to understand, and one teacher suggested that the content stretched her Year 10 learners too far.

LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM

■ There was some mention by teachers that the content of the performance had clear curriculum links into GCSE science subjects, as such it also enabled subsequent discussion and debate in the school in relation to ethics associated with scientific developments and investigation.

DIFFERENCES FOR PARTICIPANTS WHOSE PARENTS DID NOT GO TO UNIVERSITY

■ More pupils, whose parents went to University, wish to progress to University than those who had parents who did not. Our data provides that the difference is almost 20% for those who have a parental reference or link to University study. This demonstrates that the desire to move on to higher education is stronger and more established for those who have prior parental engagement with University study. This provides solid, local, evidence for the continuation of targeted outreach and engagement provision that provides positive messages of encouragement for those pupils who have a limited exposure to higher education provision.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

■ We examined learning gain data according to gender to explore differences or similarities between the two groups. Reflecting on the performance, there was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in relation to learning from actors and live theatre (girls have a greater preference for this over boys); girls have a stronger belief that patients should help make decisions about medical research work; girls are more interested in how to do research work than boys, and they are more interested in going to University than boys.

HOW COULD IT BE IMPROVED?

■ In addition to exploring what worked well in the performance and subsequent debate, we were also interested in which elements, from a school perspective could be enhanced or improved. One area that was mentioned was the fact that the performance covered issues that caused an emotional response from the audience (this was particularly so when covering the deteriorating health – and eventual death of one of the characters). Comments received from teachers in relation to this tended to suggest that follow-up pastoral support may be required to deal with and explore the issues raised in the production.

■ As might have been expected, experience of debating – including its conventions and mechanics – was variable amongst participating audience members. Some, with more developed and enhanced public speaking and social skills, excelled in the sessions – whilst others, who were new to the experience, found it more difficult to engage when themes or question areas were put forward by the production team.

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Introduction

This report presents an impact evaluation of a set of outreach events in West Yorkshire schools that took place in March 2016. The events were called 'People are Messy'. They consisted of a play and debate about the involvement of patients and the public in medical research. 'People are Messy' was devised, produced and delivered by Theatre of Debate with support from NIHR Oxford Biomedical Research Centre and a Wellcome Trust Strategic Award.

Collectively, in six state sector West Yorkshire schools, 'People are Messy' events were attended by over 1200 students and around 30 teachers. Four of the six schools were 'Target 16' schools, identified through the HEART partnership of 12 West Yorkshire higher education providers. HEART is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and is the formally recognized H.E. Single Point of Contact in West Yorkshire. The 'Target 16' schools are the partners' focus for collaborative efforts to improve student attainment and progression in schools deemed 'low participation and in areas of low progression to H.E'.

THEATRE OF DEBATE

Theatre of Debate's 'People are Messy' production tells the story of Vik and Jake, two young men who respond very differently to their diagnosis of aplastic anaemia, a rare but life-threatening condition. The play is both humorous and hard-hitting. The core theme of the play concerns patient and public involvement in medical research. It has the following learning and drama objectives as outlined by the Theatre of Debate production team:

Learning objectives:

- To understand what Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) is and how it affects people.
- To understand the effects of a disease like aplastic anemia can have on people.
- To be able to form an opinion around PPI, its impact and other issues within the play.
- To be able to participate in a debate around the benefits of PPI on doctors, patients and research.

Drama learning objective:

- To understand the role theatre can play in educating and informing audiences.

To meet its various objectives the performance touches on a range of themes including bereavement, grief and living with a rare and sometimes terminal disease. It raises various questions such as:

- Who should make decisions about medical research? Are patients (and members of the public) only needed as 'guinea pigs' for clinical trials or should they have a role determining what research is done?
- Should patients take an active part in decisions about their treatment or is it better if they rely entirely on the expertise of their doctor?
- How can patient and public involvement (PPI) benefit doctors, patients and research?

Following the performance, pupils are encouraged to participate in a structured debate about its content and the issues it raises.

OUR APPROACH TO EVALUATION

This University of Leeds evaluation of the 'People are Messy' events in West Yorkshire involved collecting data from participating students and teachers. Students completed a short single-sheet survey, side 'A' was completed prior to the performance, and following the performance and debate side 'B' was completed. The survey sought views on the performance, as well as attitudes towards study – and higher education in particular. The survey instrument also utilised the Research Toolkit Learning Gain[®] methodology to explore development or learning gain resulting from the experience.

The Learning Gain tool[®] is an interactive resource capable of assessing and measuring impact of educational interventions. It uses pre- and post-activity data to explore impact from the perspective of the activity (the student audience members). It has been successfully used to assess change in provision in Hospital Trusts, examined successful elements of University Summer School programmes, and is currently being used as part of the evaluation strategy for a collaboration of 15 Higher Education institutions in West Yorkshire. Results, using this tool, are generally displayed visually as radar charts – aiding participants and programme management to quickly view impact areas.

Ten people from the University of Leeds were involved in school visits for the performances of Theatre of Debate's 'People are Messy'. Four were present at each event to administer the surveys and conduct the teacher interviews.

A number of teachers took part in structured, recorded interviews following the performances at their schools. Interview topics focused on reflections on the performances and impact on the attending pupils and wider school.

A summary of the data we collected is presented as Table 1 below.

School	Number of surveys returned	Number of teacher interviews
Brigshaw High School	182	2
Dixons Trinity Academy	216	2
Garforth Academy	271	1
Westborough High School	138	2
Manor Croft Academy	201	2
Immanuel College	192	2
Totals	1200	11

Table 1: Data collected at 'People are Messy' performances

We have collected data in order to present findings in relation to a number of core themes: reflections on widening participation initiatives (and working with universities), and reflections on the performance.

Reflections on widening participation initiatives

TARGETING OUTREACH ON WIDENING PARTICIPATION STUDENTS

Part of our survey asked participating pupils to identify their home postcode, which enabled analysis by HEFCE's POLAR3 classification, as well as indices of deprivation (IMD) indicators issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government. We have used the latest available POLAR3 data published via the HEFCE website (which draws upon 2001 Census area statistics ward codes mapped across to young participation levels). We specifically used the 'Look-up between unit postcode and the POLAR3 and the HE-qualified adult classification of 2001 Census Area Statistics wards' (HEFCE, 2015) document. We also explored English indices of deprivation data (DGLC, 2015) provided via the Department for Government and Local Communities.

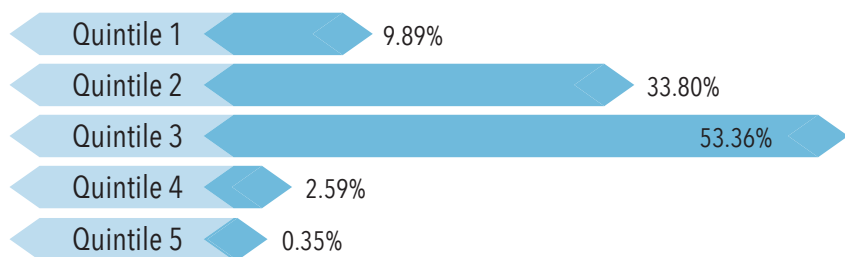


Chart 1: Classification of respondents: POLAR3 young participation quintile - 1(low)-5(high) n=849

Cleaning data (removing errors and no responses) resulted in mapping 71% (849) of our respondent data to postcode data capable of mapping across to POLAR3 and IMD classifications.

Data have been mapped across to the postcode cited by respondents who completed our pre and post performance survey instrument. Not all respondents provided valid postcode data - cleaning and removal of error postcodes provided the results presented here.

Chart 1 provides that almost all participants (97%) reside within postcode areas classified as belonging to POLAR3 quintile 1 to 3, with 44% residing in postcode areas identified as the most deprived (quintile 1 or 2). Mapping postcode data to IMD indicators (Chart 2) provides that 60% of participants reside within deciles 1 to 5, with 45% residing in postcode areas identified as the most deprived (decile 1 to 3).

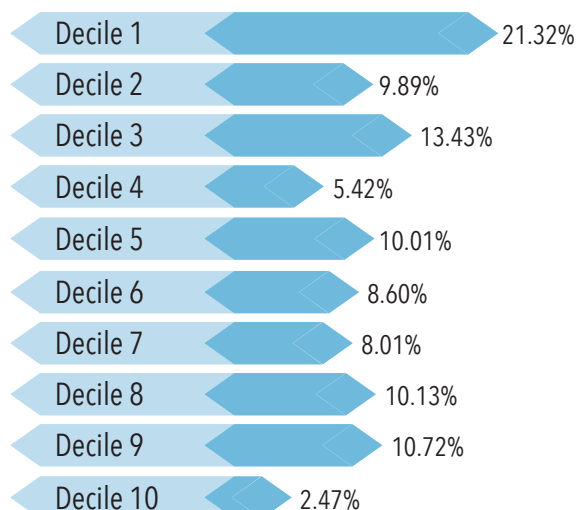


Chart 2: Classification of respondents: IMD (2015) Decile (1=most deprived; 10=least deprived) n=849

PARTICIPATING STUDENTS

In each participating school we supported up to two performances of Theatre of Debate's 'People are messy' with audience sizes of around 150 for each performance. As a result of timetabling difficulties, only one performance was delivered at Westborough High School, which meant an audience of around 200 students. It is worth noting that student numbers participating in the Theatre of Debate experience were higher than those completing our evaluation survey due to non-completion, damaged or spoiled survey papers.

Using evaluation survey responses received as a proxy, it appears that more students from Garforth Academy (271) saw the performance than from any other school (see Table 2, below). In terms of age or year group, over two thirds of those participating were aged 13-14 (see Table 3, opposite) and indicated that they were in Year 9 or Year 10 (See Table 4, opposite). A little over half of respondents (51.4%) indicated that they were male, although this proportion may be higher as a small number of respondents (3.8%) elected not to indicate their gender.

Answer Options	Response Count	Response Percent
Brigshaw High School	182	15.2 %
Dixons Trinity Academy	216	18.0 %
Garforth Academy	271	22.6 %
Westborough High School	138	11.5 %
Manor Croft Academy	201	16.8 %
Immanuel College	192	16.0 %
No response / other	0	0.0 %
	1200	100%

Table 2: (Q1) What is the name of your school?

Answer Options	Response Count	Response Percent
13	212	17.7 %
14	589	49.1 %
15	391	32.6 %
16	2	0.2 %
17 or older	0	0.0 %
No response / other	6	0.5 %
	1200	100%

Table 3: (Q2) How old are you?

Answer Options	Response Count	Response Percent
Year 9	467	38.9 %
Year 10	707	58.9 %
Year 11 or higher	2	0.2 %
No response / other	24	2.0 %
	1200	100%

Table 4: (Q3) What is your year group?

VIEWS ON UNIVERSITY STUDY

We asked participants (before and after the performance) if they were considering progressing to university. Almost three-quarters of participants (see Chart 3, below) had strong positive views on progressing to university before the performance and this strong intention was maintained following the performance.

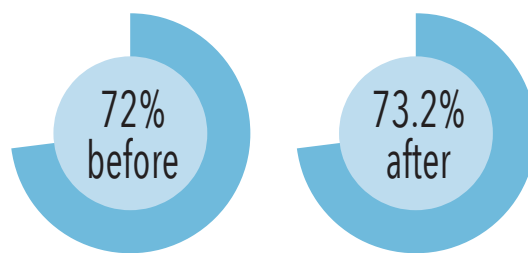


Chart 3: Percentage of participants who either 'might' or 'definitely' progress to university

Reflecting on observed reactions from participating students, some teachers told us that the performance enabled complex medical issues relating to ethics and research to be contextualised and discussed/debated in a non-threatening, informal and collaborative way. This added to the science provision delivered by schools and covered important curriculum areas.

“... from my point of view as a science teacher, it's very difficult to put across medical ethics issues, and have that kind of informed debate. You've got to allow the students time to develop their knowledge and understanding before they can apply their ideas – I think the performance and debate gave them a nice safe environment within which to do that.”
Teacher, Brigshaw High School.

REACTION TO THE PERFORMANCE FROM PARTICIPATING STUDENTS

As part of our general evaluation questions, we asked participants if they had enjoyed the experience of Theatre of Debate; almost all (82.5%) indicated that it was 'good' or 'very good'. Less than 2% thought the performance and debate was 'poor' (see Chart 4, below).

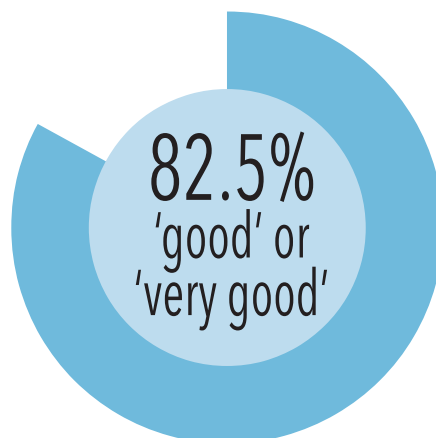


Chart 4: Percentage of participants who thought the performance was 'good' or 'very good'

LEARNING DEVELOPMENT OR GAIN FROM THE EXPERIENCE

In order to measure or assess learning gain of participating students we asked them to record their views in relation to a number of rating scale questions. We asked them to record their views prior to the performance, and then again following the debate (which followed the performance and completed the Theatre of Debate experience). Mean average scores were calculated for each statement presented to participating students (where a low average 'score' of '1' would mean that this was the worst it could possibly be, and a high average score of '10' would mean that this was the best that it could possibly be). Most statements received reasonably positive ratings prior to the performance taking place, except for question two, where there was generally strong disagreement with the statement that 'research is a waste of time or money'.

In almost all statement areas, looking at pre- and post-performance average scores, we found that the resulting differences were statistically significant (unlikely to be as a result of chance) using paired sample t tests (see Table 5 and Chart 5, opposite). However, it should be noted that some differences pre- and post-performance were slight so impact or learning gain here is more difficult to clearly evidence. The only statement where there was not a recorded statistically significant difference was the third statement: 'Doctors should undertake medical research work'. The view on this statement was fairly negative (in disagreement) pre-performance and this level of disagreement was broadly maintained post-performance.

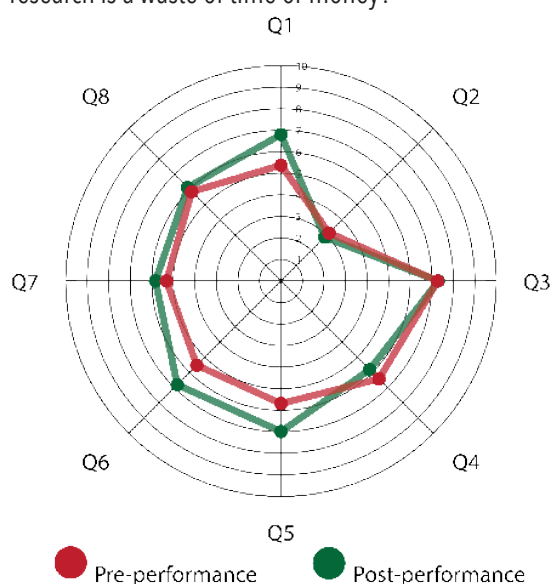


Chart 5: Learning gain - all responses

Statements:	Pre-performance average (out of 10)	Post-performance average (out of 10)	Change
(Q1) I like learning from actors and live theatre	5.38	6.80	1.42 ▲
(Q2) I think research is a waste of time or money	3.16	2.87	-0.29 ▼
(Q3) Doctors should undertake medical research work	7.28	7.30	0.02 ▲
(Q4) Doctors should decide what medical research work is done	6.43	5.82	-0.61 ▼
(Q5) Patients should help decide what medical research is done	5.69	6.99	1.30 ▲
(Q6) Sometimes patients are experts on their own illness	5.53	6.81	1.28 ▲
(Q7) I am interested in how to do research	5.32	5.83	0.51 ▲
(Q8) I'm interested in a career that involves me going to University (such as becoming a doctor, nurse, paramedic or scientist)	5.86	6.14	0.28 ▲

Table 5: (Q8 and Q12) Statements about the performance (all respondents)

The most visible 'gain' for participants post-performance was in the area of learning from actors and live theatre, a stronger belief that patients should help decide what medical research work is done, and that patients can be viewed as experts on their own illness. Less pronounced 'gains' were shown in relation to interest in how to do research and moving onto a career that involves going to university to pursue a programme of study linked to healthcare or medicine.

The only negative movement in average scores (although slight) was in the area of research being a waste of time or money; the strength of this view was somewhat diluted post-performance. There was also, post-performance, a less strongly-held belief that doctors should decide what medical research work is done.

Reflections on the performance

THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE

All of the teaching staff we spoke with following the performance provided positive comments on the overall experience. Comments focused on the professional approach taken by the production team and the clarity of messages within the story. Some teachers also welcomed the fact that the story was contemporary and delivered in a stylised and fast-paced way.

“ I really enjoyed it. The kids really enjoyed it. They were really quiet and seemed quite engaged in the actual drama. It was quite deep. I think it got them engaged and thinking. ”
Teacher, Garforth Academy.

“ ... I think, quite clearly, it was very modern, it was very up to date. The choice of the characters worked really well to engage with the young people. I think the fact that you had the tow young lads just makes it immediately resonate more with them. ”
Teacher, Dixons Trinity Academy.

CONTENT OF THE PERFORMANCE

We received some detailed commentary and feedback on the structure and content of the performance. Feedback indicated that the dialogue and content of the play was at a level that was generally non-patronising and understandable to the audience (mainly 13-14 year olds).

“ The medical discussions were quite complex yet were presented in such a way that I think you could follow it ... the dialogue and the content wasn't patronising, it was actually quite high level, high brow to some extent. ”
Teacher, Dixons Trinity Academy.

Teachers were asked if the content of the performance was relevant to the audience and pitched at an appropriate level. Almost all agreed that it was and whilst it stretched some audience groups in a thought-provoking way, it delivered important messages that were capable of further exploration in the debate that followed. Some teachers commented that the detail relating to medical research work was difficult for some to understand, and one teacher suggested that the content stretched her Year 10 learners too far. In focusing on the relevance to the audience, one other teacher agreed that the performance would have suited an older age group.

“ I think perhaps Year 10 was a little bit low as a year group. Maybe it would have worked better with Year 11 or post-16. The Year 10 group did get it, but it was kind of quite technical and fast-paced for them. ”
Teacher Immanuel College.

“ I don't know if it's an ability thing and some of the higher abilities have grasped it, or if it's a maturity thing in that some of them could maybe relate to it. Perhaps it would have been better to do it for a higher year group. ”
Teacher, Garforth Academy.

LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM

There was some mention by teachers that the content of the performance had clear curriculum links into GCSE science subjects, as such it also enabled subsequent discussion and debate in the school in relation to ethics associated with scientific developments and investigation. Of particular relevance were the links cited by some teachers into the relatively new requirement by the Department for Education for schools to include content and coverage related to spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Some expressed that the 'People are Messy' production and subsequent debate enabled them to collect evidence of pupil development in these areas.

“... clearly the performance is linked to science. Its stuff we do talk about in the current GCSE curriculum. We talk about drugs testing, and it kind of links into the whole idea of research, ethics and SMSC – which is having a massive push in schools at the moment.”
Teacher, Garforth Academy.

“[In terms of SMSC] ... this performance links into that and we can follow those links up within the school in the next few weeks. I think there are some students who may like to follow on from this and explore it in more depth. I think it will be talked about for quite a while.”
Teacher, Manor Croft Academy.

STUDENT RESPONSE TO THE PERFORMANCE - TEACHERS PERSPECTIVE

Reaction and response from students, as reported by teachers, was extremely positive. Students engaged with the content of the performance and were interested in the situations faced by the characters.

“... they were engrossed in it. There was a respectful silence and they found certain things amusing. The particular sad thing at the end showed how engaged the students were – it showed that they had invested in these characters. The audience were moved by what they were seeing.”
Teacher, Dixons Trinity Academy.

The production took advantage of technology (voting pads) to encourage engagement with the participating students; teachers welcomed this interaction as it enabled all pupils to put forward their views and reactions to elements of the performance in a way that was more anonymous than the formalized debate element of the production.

“... the use of multimedia and voting button system was a really good addition to the production. It provided a great deal of interaction.”
Teacher, Brigshaw High School.

DIFFERENCES FOR PARTICIPANTS WHOSE PARENTS DID NOT GO TO UNIVERSITY

More pupils, whose parents went to University, wish to progress to University than those who had parents who did not. Our data provides that the difference is almost 20% for those who have a parental reference or link to University study (see Chart 6 opposite). This demonstrates that the desire to move on to higher education is stronger and more established for those who have prior parental engagement with University study. This provides solid, local, evidence for the continuation of targeted outreach and engagement provision that provides positive messages of encouragement for those pupils who have a limited exposure to higher education provision.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

We examined learning gain data according to gender to explore differences or similarities between the two groups (see Table 6 opposite, and Table 7 overleaf). Differences pre- and post-performance were generally similar for both groups, although girls have a more pronounced and positive view on learning from actors and live theatre. In addition, girls felt more strongly that patients should be involved in making decisions about research work and that they could be viewed as experts on their own illness. As differences between the two groups following the performance were not vast, we employed statistical tests to explore their significance. Reflecting on the performance, there was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in relation to learning from actors and live theatre (girls have a greater preference for this over boys); girls have a stronger belief that patients should help make decisions about medical research work; girls are more interested in how to do research work than boys, and they are more interested in going to University than boys.

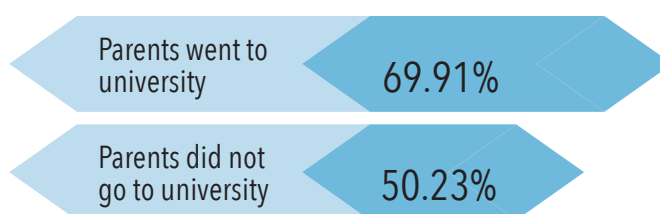


Chart 6: Participating students: 'Did your parents go to university?'

Statements:	Pre-performance average (out of 10)	Post-performance average (out of 10)	Change
(Q1) I like learning from actors and live theatre	4.97	6.34	1.37 ▲
(Q2) I think research is a waste of time or money	3.08	2.86	-0.22 ▼
(Q3) Doctors should undertake medical research work	7.40	7.42	0.02 ▲
(Q4) Doctors should decide what medical research work is done	6.49	5.93	-0.56 ▼
(Q5) Patients should help decide what medical research is done	5.55	6.82	1.27 ▲
(Q6) Sometimes patients are experts on their own illness	5.38	6.69	1.31 ▲
(Q7) I am interested in how to do research	5.26	5.66	0.40 ▲
(Q8) I'm interested in a career that involves me going to University (such as becoming a doctor, nurse, paramedic or scientist)	5.64	5.93	0.29 ▲

Table 6: (Q8 and Q12) Statements about the performance (male respondents)

Statements:	Pre-performance average (out of 10)	Post-performance average (out of 10)	Change
(Q1) I like learning from actors and live theatre	5.83	7.32	1.49 ▲
(Q2) I think research is a waste of time or money	3.30	2.91	-0.39 ▼
(Q3) Doctors should undertake medical research work	7.14	7.21	0.07 ▲
(Q4) Doctors should decide what medical research work is done	6.39	5.67	-0.72 ▼
(Q5) Patients should help decide what medical research is done	5.80	7.18	1.38 ▲
(Q6) Sometimes patients are experts on their own illness	5.71	6.93	1.22 ▲
(Q7) I am interested in how to do research	5.42	6.04	0.62 ▲
(Q8) I'm interested in a career that involves me going to University (such as becoming a doctor, nurse, paramedic or scientist)	6.17	6.43	0.26 ▲

Table: XX (Q8 and Q12) Statements about the performance (female respondents)

HOW COULD IT BE IMPROVED?

In addition to exploring what worked well in the performance and subsequent debate, we were also interested in which elements, from a school perspective could be enhanced or improved. Limited information on this was received from teachers in our interviews and this may be indicative of the extremely positive feedback received generally. One area that was mentioned was the fact that the performance covered issues that caused an emotional response from the audience (this was particularly so when covering the deteriorating health – and eventual death of one of the characters). Comments received from teachers in relation to this tended to suggest that follow-up pastoral support may be required to deal with and explore the issues raised in the production.

“There were certain pastoral issues raised during the performance, so certain kids got upset during it. It would be nice if there were some sort of reference as to where those kids go afterwards for support and guidance. It would be really useful – even if it's just a Childline number put up on the board or something.”
Teacher Immanuel College.

As might have been expected, experience of debating – including its conventions and mechanics – was variable amongst participating audience members. Some, with more developed and enhanced public speaking and social skills, excelled in the sessions – whilst others, who were new to the experience, found it more difficult to engage when themes or question areas were put forward by the production team. Some teachers informed us that many audience members had opinions on the performance, but they lacked the confidence to ‘speak up’ on these when situation in a formalised debating environment. One solution to this issue would be to work with the audience in smaller groups, focused around key topics or characters from the performance.

“... it was difficult to engage with the students during the debate at first. I think if you started the debate in smaller groups to begin with and then they could feedback to the larger group – that may help. Also, if they got to chat with the characters in smaller groups it would have made it easier for my students to talk about the issues raised in the performance.”
Teacher, Westborough High School.

“They needed prompting a little bit. Normally they would do that but I think they were a little intimidated by the strangers in the room. Normally, when its staff that they know they are usually ok, but with strangers it takes a little bit longer to build up confidence.”
Teacher, Manor Croft Academy.

“An alternative format to the debate might provide beneficial in generating more discussion and debate. Such a format might include breaking the audience off into groups, each group with a character and teacher to supervise and stimulate smaller discussions. After which, the groups could come together to have a more inclusive dialogue about what they have been discussing and what conclusions they have made.”
Teacher, Dixons Trinity Academy.

Conclusions

LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM

Theatre of Debate's 'People are Messy' provides an innovative and interactive way to engage young people in discussions and debates about the ethical and human issues involved in medical research work. Feedback from teachers provides evidence that the content of the production links clearly to a range of curriculum areas covered by GCSE learners. The content links not only to science-based subjects but also personal development and citizenship provision.

LEARNING GAIN

The value or 'gain' experienced by participating students has been measured and is statistically significant (although gains are slight in some areas). These changes or developments in understanding and perception highlight, amongst other things, the impact of the production. This should be commended and celebrated and many of the teachers interviewed would welcome such interventions in their schools in future.

ENGAGING WITH DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

The 'Target 16' schools are deemed to be some of the most disadvantaged or poorly served schools in West Yorkshire. As such, engagement with such schools can prove to be challenging or difficult. In some of our participating schools, students found the experience of actively engaging in the production and subsequent debate alien and uncomfortable – which in one case led to the halting of the production whilst student behavior was more carefully managed by the teaching staff. Such difficulties, perhaps, should be expected in schools where access to externally provided activities and events is limited, and teaching staff are less familiar with the requirements of such interactions. To add even more value to Theatre of Debate productions in disadvantaged schools it may be useful to ensure participating students are aware of the conventions associated with observing a production and participating in a debate. This could be planning activity carried out by teaching staff in school (suitably briefed) in the weeks preceeding the delivery of the production.

INTENTION TO PROGRESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

We have identified a number of developments or learning gains resulting from the interventions supported by the Theatre of Debate production. In addition, our work has collected clear evidence that historical familiarity with university and higher education provision (through parental engagement) results in a greater desire for pupils to progress to higher study. This provides solid, local, evidence for the continuation of targeted outreach and engagement provision that provides positive messages of encouragement for those pupils who have a limited exposure to higher education provision.

References and further reading

HEFCE (2015) 'Look-up between unit postcode and the POLAR3 and the HE-qualified adult classification of 2001 Census Area Statistics wards'. Higher Education Funding Council for England (Accessed 1st June 2016). Available at: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR/POLAR3,data/>.

(DGLC, 2015) English indices of deprivation 2015. Department for Government and Local Communities (Accessed 1st June 2016). Available at: <http://imd-by-postcode.opendatacommunities.org/>.

