

Shakespeare Globe Centre NZ Emerging Theatre Practitioner's Programme 2015 Report



I was selected by Shakespeare Globe Centre NZ to travel to London, April - June 2015, to investigate and participate in projects at The Globe Theatre. This opportunity was aimed at theatre 'practitioners', which, in NZ, means 'artist' or director/actor but at The Globe in London, 'practitioner' means 'teacher' or 'facilitator'. When we arrived we realised that we would be working only with Globe Education and the projects they had with a variety of students and schools in the Southwark region. This was both exciting and challenging at times. As a teacher, I felt very comfortable with the expectations of the course, but I was also worried that I would not be challenged enough, since I work with students every day. It is fair to say that after two and a half months in London, I learnt a huge variety of techniques and strategies with which to approach Shakespeare in future situations, as well as learning about the institution of Globe Education and life in general. This was a valuable and enriching experience.

Globe Education

One of the most interesting things I learnt about Globe Education was the unique relationship that they have with New Zealand and SGCNZ. After sitting down with a representative from Higher Education, it became extremely clear that the opportunities that we are given in New Zealand, such as the NZ Young Shakespeare Company, Teacher's Go Global and The Emerging Theatre Practitioner's Programme are entirely unique. We are the only country in the world to have such privileged access to The Globe and its projects. This made me realise how important our relationship is with The Globe, how fortunate our students are for being able to have access to Globe tutors, directors and teachers, and how lucky we are to have Dawn Sanders who has forged these relationships and sustained them over the years with The Globe.

Secondly, I have learnt that Globe Education is a huge institution. Not only do they serve students on a daily basis, through Lively Action tours and workshops, but they also work on long term projects, both on site and off site, in schools around the region and country. They are more than happy to meet the needs of anyone who wants education or learning about Shakespeare. They will do their best to cater day or weekend workshops for students, teachers and university students. Ultimately, education is the 'backbone' of the entire Globe Theatre complex - something that Sam Wanamaker himself had always wanted.



Our Theatre

For ten weeks, we worked alongside Globe Theatre Practitioners, who were facilitating rehearsals and workshops with students. Their goal was to present an extract from Henry V, while empowering the students to understand and enjoy the work of Shakespeare. There were nine schools involved in the Our Theatre project and each school was given a different extract to focus on. At the end of our 10th week in London, the students all gathered at The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse and presented their scenes to an audience of family and friends.

I was placed at St Saviours & St Olaves, an all-girls school, near Elephant and Castle in Southwark. I was extremely lucky to have Kate McGregor, a London freelance director, as my Globe Theatre Practitioner. She was keen to have me involved with the students from the very start and she thoroughly respected my own teaching and directing experience. We worked harmoniously in the classroom, and I admired her calm and positive outlook throughout all the rehearsals, despite the 'difficulty' of teenagers, time pressures and the challenges of the text. Kate was able to build the student's confidence over the ten weeks and often used the student's ideas when devising scenes and providing feedback. Being able to observe her professionalism and skills over the weeks was a huge highlight and building a friendship was a bonus!

All of the hard work paid off on the final performance day. All the schools had been to visit The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse previously to understand and plan how they would use the space, and on the day they were guided carefully through the dress rehearsal by more Globe Practitioners. The ETP's were runners on the day, leading the groups from their green rooms to the upstairs tiring space backstage - we were there before they went on, and the first to congratulate them when they came off. I was extremely proud of the girls that I worked with, and was gobsmacked by the talent and respect all of the other schools presented. Some students were there to perform and others were there for the experience but either way, it was extremely rewarding. I think that the Our Theatre programme is about bringing a variety of students together to celebrate the works of Shakespeare and to highlight the validity of The Globe Theatre and the educational opportunities it provides for students in this area of London. This project was deeply rewarding and well organised by a team of practitioners and administrative crew at Globe Education. I can easily see it running successfully for a number of years and positively influencing hundreds of children in the Southwark area.



Youth Theatre

Youth Theatre is a yearlong programme for students aged 10 - 18 years. The students audition to be a part of the programme, which runs weekly on a Saturday morning for two hours. The students are divided into two groups: 10 - 14 years and 14-18 years, although most of the students in the senior group were 15/16 years of age due to the nature of exams affecting older students from committing. Each group has two Globe Education Practitioners working with them throughout the year, and they cover a variety of projects, including monologues/duologues, improvisation, production and original practice (OP) with Shakespeare's works. During the time we were involved, the students were working on a production of Much Ado about Nothing.

I was placed with the 14-18 year old group and worked alongside Fiona Drummond and Arne Pohlmeier, as well as two of the NZ Emerging Theatre Practitioners. We were lucky to arrive just in time for the beginning of the production process. In the first session, the students were cast and the play read - I was immediately blown away by the confidence and clarity in which they read the text. They had already worked quite intensively on scenes from Othello earlier in the year, and had also done a unit on improvisation, which showed in their relaxed and mature approach to the text. I could also see the style and approach that Fiona and Arne took in facilitating this group. Unlike Our Theatre, which is in a school context and sometimes difficult in behaviour management, Youth Theatre students were treated a lot more like professionals, and there was high expectations placed on the group. They always began with a process of 'checking in' which allowed the students to express how they were feeling or where they were with the rehearsal process - this was always done concisely. Fiona and Arne were also hesitant to 'direct' the students and instead preferred OP techniques and a variety of games/activities to explore the text. Original Practice is a term used to reflect the processes and practices of Shakespeare's company of actors. They would not have had a director, in the modern sense, and would often block the scenes themselves and adapt them for each performance. Knowing the essence of the scene and the qualities of the characters would help to stage the scene effectively. The students were encouraged to block their own scenes, and it was only later, when the work was being refined, that Fiona and Arne would step in and give direction when needed. I believe this gave the students more ownership of their work and also encouraged them to learn about the space they were working in.

Another highlight was the inclusion of the London Youth Orchestra, who devised the music for the production and workshopped their ideas alongside the students' rehearsals. We were also honoured to watch a performance of World War I Poetry by ex-soldiers, to help provide links

between the soldiers in Much Ado about Nothing and the decided setting of the play, which was the 1940's. Sadly, most of us were unable to attend the final performance as we were flying home to New Zealand. Overall, I have learnt that teenagers are extremely capable if high expectations are set and that approaching the text from an OP perspective can give fresh insights into the characters and relationships, as well as providing further challenges for the students and practitioners.



The Lively Action Programme

The Lively Action programme is at the heart of Globe Education. The term 'lively action' implies that Shakespeare must be approached with a sense of play and fun in its exploration, and that workshops should be 'on your feet' and highly engaging from start to finish. Alongside 'lively action' is the passion and strength of Shakespeare's words – woven carefully and surely into each well scaffolded activity or game. A Lively Action Workshop has two components: a tour of The Globe Theatre (approximately 30-40 mins) and a workshop with a Globe Education Practitioner (approximately 50-60 mins). The Globe Theatre foyer can quickly turn into a busy school traffic intersection, as one group of eager students follows a practitioner towards the theatre as another leads a group to a workshop space. Students of all ages and abilities are catered for, and a large variety of schools make their way to The Globe each day from nearby schools or from far flung counties to get a taste of Shakespeare. The tour and the workshop are integrated together with a key focus on one particular play. The teachers can recommend a play, perhaps one they have been studying in class, or a

practitioner can work with a more well-known play like *Romeo and Juliet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

During the first two weeks, I observed 8 Lively Action Tours and Workshops. There were a few things I noticed that occurred in all of the workshops. Firstly, the practitioners are very focussed on letting the students lead the tour and workshops with their knowledge and curiosity. This is facilitated through expert questioning and a 'drawing out' of information and facts that interest the kids and keep them focussed during the 90 minutes. Secondly, the play and its text is the main focus throughout the tour/workshop. Right from the very beginning the play is referenced using quotes and characters, and integrated into the Globe's history and stage design. Further into the workshop, this then supports the students to enjoy speaking Shakespeare's words and have fun with them, rather than being afraid. Thirdly, I noticed that each Tour/Workshop had a clear teaching objective – something that they wanted the students to be able to achieve by the end of it. In many cases, this was to just 'play' and enjoy the text, especially when working with younger students and foreign language students. However, the objectives were more sophisticated with the older students – at times, even hidden meanings, character motivations/relationships and text rhythms could be explored in as little as 30 minutes. Ultimately, the success of the Lively Action Tour/Workshops came down to these three elements: questioning, 'playing' with the text and a clear objective. Above and beyond this further success depended on the practitioner's experience, sense of humour, and strong leadership in the room.

After viewing this work for two weeks, we were given a Mentor to help guide us in understanding Lively Action planning at a deeper level. I was placed with Margot Gunne and two other NZ Emerging Theatre Practitioners, and we met weekly to discuss plans and trial activities and games. I chose to work on the play *Macbeth*, and over 3-4 weeks, worked on a 50-60 minute Lively Action Workshop plan with Margot. Towards the end of our time in London, we were given the opportunity to help with a warm up activity in a workshop but did not have the time to develop our plans enough to deliver the work we had been invested in. I was unable to participate in a final Lively Action workshop but I do feel I gained a very clear understanding of how they work and the purpose behind them. Working with Margot was very rewarding and her commitment to our progress and learning was appreciated, as well as her wisdom and life experience. She went above and beyond the expectations of her role, in helping us feel successful when understanding the essence of Lively Action. I think that making Shakespeare come alive in a fantastic theatre like The Globe will always be a selling point for Globe Education. These Lively Action workshops allow the students to become hands on with Shakespeare's text under the assurance of guided teachers. I always saw children enjoying the workshops and taking that enjoyment out into the corridors with them as they left. This is why I think Lively Action will continue to be at the heart of Globe Education for many years to come.



Personal Professional Development

During the 10 week programme, there was also room for personal and professional development. Together as New Zealanders, we decided to work collaboratively each week by sharing ideas and workshoping with each other. We regularly gathered on a Saturday afternoon in a room at Sackler Studios, kindly donated by Globe Education, and took turns to facilitate workshops, discuss and debate, and experiment with the work we had been creating. While our main focus was on Lively Action at first, it later included a lot of development in Directing, Physical Theatre, our processes and 'theatre' and Shakespeare in general. It was a great opportunity for each of us to share our strengths as theatre practitioners and artists, as well as giving us each a chance to gain valuable leadership experience and learn from others. We found that establishing a safe environment and setting up firm expectations made the workshops more effective. When we stuck to a plan, listened to each other and took risks, we realised that we were valuable sources of experience and knowledge. Personally, I think this mutual respect also helped to bring us closer as friends, and therefore we were more open to each other and the whole 10 week experience.

The Globe also provided further personal development by offering a variety of extra programmes that we could attend in our own time. I thoroughly enjoyed attending Research in Action at The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. The seminar was focussed on whether a male or female actor influenced the opinions of the audience when portraying a female role - in both Jacobean and modern day contexts. A female character was played by both a young boy and then a woman from the exact same scene and the audience was asked to feedback their impressions. I think that this form was very engaging, as it allowed you to 'see' the work, not just discuss it and read about it in an essay. I also attended a Storytelling performance of The Tempest at The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. Here, two actors had reimagined the story of The Tempest for much younger children. The performance is part storytelling, part performance, part lesson - the kids are heavily involved and help influence how the story unravels. I think that Globe Education has created two great events here, at the SWP, to help get people excited about Shakespeare in non-traditional forms. We were also able to observe a Higher Education workshop, gain access to The Globe Theatre Library Archive, and watch three Shakespearean plays at The Globe: Romeo and Juliet, As You Like It and Merchant of Venice.

I also attended a three day Meisner acting course, run by Kate Maravan, with three of the other Emerging Practitioners, which reignited and inspired me in many ways. Our Globe mentors had recommended the course, due to its links to Lively Action practice, and I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to learn as an actor, instead of just a teacher, during the course. To me, Meisner is all about connecting with another actor and finding truth on stage. Kate's wisdom and understanding of

how theatre and life mix in complex ways was highly insightful and had a profound affect on me. I also attended over 20 shows during my ten weeks in London. From West End Musicals to small unknown theatre spaces, all the shows I experienced contributed to my professional development and overall enjoyment of the trip. Epic theatre at The National was amazing to see but I think my absolute favourite was still The Globe - in particular, Jonathan Pryce as Shylock in The Merchant of Venice - I even saw it twice! I was extremely lucky to have my mum and my partner visit me for two weeks during the course. We travelled around London and to Edinburgh, York, Hull, Oxford and Brighton. I have many highlights from my personal travels, in particular, I was very proud to be a kiwi and spend ANZAC morning at Constitution Hill in Hyde Park on such an important anniversary.



Conclusions

Overall, I found the 10 week SGCNZ Emerging Theatre Practitioner's Programme highly rewarding. I was academically, mentally and emotionally challenged during my time in London but learnt to overcome those challenges and learn from my experience. I have learnt that Globe Education is a powerful institution that has a firm future as an educational facility due to its engaging and varied projects embedded in the community and the essence of 'Lively Action' at its heart. I have come back from this trip with a new vitality. I want to bring some of the 'essence' of Globe Education and London back to New Zealand and put it into my classroom, my projects, my theatre company, my community, and my life. I have realised that students are highly capable of understanding the complexities of Shakespeare and that a good practitioner/teacher is also a good leader and a guide to those students. I have learnt that relationships and connection are important to growth, both in myself and in others. We are often so busy hiding how we are feeling, or how we think we should be feeling that we do not lead truthful lives and often miss out on experiences that we desire. If anything, this trip has taught me that if you want something you have to be active in seeking it, and that there will always be people and systems around you to support your journey. I could not have had this amazing experience without the support of Dawn Sanders and SGCNZ, funding from The Jaycee Family Trust, my colleagues, my family and my friends. To them, I say 'thank you'. Thank you for allowing me this chance - now it is my turn to return your generosity as I continue my journey back here in NZ. I have no idea what the future holds but I do know that London and The Globe haven't seen the last of me...