

WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL
TRUST



FELLOWSHIP
2007

JEN PRESCOTT
COMMUNITY ARTS WORKER

Jen Prescott
WCMT Fellowship 2007

**Observing how theatre and arts organisations in New York
engage with young people in inner city areas**

Introduction

My background

My fellowship reflected the area of work which I have been involved in for nearly 10 years. Theatre and arts education is a small and varied facet of the arts industry that can have many meanings and there is no set definition to describe what this work actually is. Those who say there are a dentist (for example) are able to sum up their work pretty accurately within that one word. For an arts education worker in the UK it is much harder. However as you will read about later, this problem was solved early on in my fellowship. For my purposes however I would describe my work as using arts (mainly theatre and music) to engage with groups or individuals. This can be in a formal setting such as a school or college, or through community based groups, such as youth groups and charities, or through an arts organisation such as a theatre or orchestra. Much of my work is based around engaging young people in arts activity. In my career the path of arts education has involved work with schools, colleges, orchestras, youth groups, zoos, local authorities, theatres, environmental groups, charities and nurseries among others. I have been working as a teacher of theatre arts in a learning centre in Liverpool since 2004. In this work I teach a 3 week programme of workshops to visiting classes of pupils aged 4-16 from local primary and secondary schools. Through this work I use theatre, dance, music and visual arts to explore a topic with the pupils. It is through this work that my career as an arts practitioner is developing. This work however can be lonely. There are no other local practitioners who work the same way I do and I often find that I have been working in isolation of other arts practices, and I began to think perhaps this would be making my own work stale. I would discuss my work with 2 other practitioners who I trained with and who live in London and Australia, and I found those conversations would help challenge my work and bring up new ideas for developing new work. I soon realised however that rather than discussing the development of my practice with friends far away I needed to be engaging much more with my local arts industry and communities to ensure that the work and projects I undertook were grounded in my own community. I needed to be a practitioner for my own city, the city of Liverpool. After all this city is one of the most creative places on the planet, why was I not using that? I realised that now that I had gained a good few years of practical experience in this field I needed to expand my own learning to see how to apply my skills further afield. It was around this time when I was reminded of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, by a friend who had undertaken a fellowship a few years earlier. I saw a category that was applicable to my work and began to formulate a fellowship which would challenge and expand my skills and experiences.

My fellowship

My fellowship would look at how arts practitioners engage with hard to reach communities of young people in a city environment. Liverpool as a city has been changing over the past few years, it is becoming much more aware of itself and proud of what it is. This has led to the development of the city on a physical level, with buildings and activities taking place but has also led to the development of the cities confidence, and it is reflected in the people who live here. This new found development has led to Liverpool winning the title of European Capital of Culture 2008. This year marks the start of a new chapter in Liverpool's life and allows the culture of the city to make its mark on a national and international scale. What better time to embrace the values of the Churchill trust and create a fellowship which would build links and share skills on an international level. That is what my fellowship was about for me, to help me find how I could play my part in the continuing development of the Liverpool and how my arts practice would support that.

My fellowship was to take place in New York. I chose this city as it has lot in common with Liverpool. A large city, the look of the waterfront, the unique people, a thriving arts industry and a shared maritime history which both cities were build on. Liverpool and New York also share similar challenges such as a history of unemployment, turbulent communities, declining industry and pockets of disengaged young people. My fellowship was to explore how the arts education industry in New York engaged with hard to reach groups of young people in the city and how arts work was delivered in the city. Through the fellowship I would look at the work a number of arts organisations who worked throughout the city.



Welcome to Liverpool



Welcome to New York

The Fellowship

I was careful to heed the advice of a former Churchill fellow when planning my fellowship that I did not make too many plans before hand so that when I was there I was inflexible to take up any opportunities that arose while I was there. However I did make some prior contacts, and as with any good adventure, they were also other unplanned experiences along the way!

Below are the 5 main organisations who I spent time with to varying degrees during my fellowship. Each section starts with a brief description of each organisation before I go into my experiences with them during my fellowship. A full itinerary of my trip is located in the appendix of this report.

CAT – Creative Arts Team based at the City University, Manhattan, New York. Main contact: Mr Chris Vine

The CAT team have been delivering drama education work in the city for 20 years, and run a large number of programmes. These include high school health education programmes, youth theatres, early years drama programmes, Anti bullying projects, student and teacher training/development, artist training and delivering formal drama courses.

The first meeting I had in New York during my fellowship was at CAT headquarters in the heart of Manhattan. A large bright office space, with lots of people working busily away in cubicles, surely this isn't an arts organisation trying to scrape a living in theatre education? I was expecting a small team beavering away in a rented office space somewhere. This was tip top stuff, and when I saw the dance studio built into the office space I knew it was some sort of haven for arts workers! I was met by Chris Vine, a cockney! Typical, I go all this way to another country and am met with a southerner! Originally CAT was part of New York University but has recently split to join the City University of New York. I was introduced to the work of CAT and was blown away by the scale of it. They deliver in school programmes at each stage of development, from early years, elementary, junior high and senior high school. These programmes see teaching artists deliver work in the classrooms on a regular basis for all or part of a term. They also deliver parent programmes, university courses, teacher training and artist training. Chris had produced a list of all the work CAT was doing during my stay in New York, and invited me along to any of the sessions. I jumped at the chance and went to see as much of their work as I could. I could have quite easily spent my entire fellowship just at this one place!

I started off on the high school drama programme, where I joined the team of teaching artists on a health education programme on AIDS awareness. Once I had got over the shock of high school security with the pupils going through metal detectors and armed guards in the corridors, we visited 3 classes in a morning, having only a small time in each one. The artists performed scenes for the pupils, and then engaged them in questions after. They were up against the clock, the classroom space and the kids attention all the way, but each class I saw did engage with them, and responded to them in some way.

It was a pressurised situation for the artists, but they were very effective. I visited this programme a few times and was able to see the steady development of the pupils along the way.

I then joined an early years drama programme in the Bronx area of the city. It was a great opportunity to see work taking place in schools in this borough. The Bronx is an area with many challenges around racism, segregation, economic hardship, unemployment and health issues, and it has had a pretty bad press over the years. I was very interested to see the work undertaken by CAT here, and really enjoyed meeting the children in these schools, who were bubbly, energetic and creative. I joined Helen Wheelock on her residency to one of the schools. Again, time pressures meant sessions were short but Helen had been building up a presence in the school for a while now and was gradually working with nearly every pupil, which is quite an achievement in such a large school. The sessions provided a break from the classroom routine, and enabled children to engage with each other and the artist in a relaxed way. I then joined two teaching artists on a programme in another part of the Bronx which explored bullying through the story of two Japanese cranes. The suspension disbelief the artists managed to create with the pupils in these small classrooms was fantastic. The pupils were engaged in the work from day one. They were working with classes on five consecutive days to build up a story with them and work towards resolutions to bullying problems. In these classrooms I was also engaged in cultural exchanges with the pupils. During their goodbye song the children learn how to say goodbye in two different languages. One pupil asked how to say goodbye where I came from, so I taught the pupils how to say "tar-rar" in their best scouse accent! I visited the three CAT youth theatre groups led by Helen White (another Brit!). Each group was made up of young people from all five areas of New York. The youth groups help to train teaching artists in delivering arts work. The youth theatres were fantastic, energised and thoughtful, producing work that meant something to the young people taking part. I learnt that the youth theatre would be visiting Liverpool in 2008 as part of a project run by a Manchester theatre. So I spent some time with the group telling them about Liverpool and showing them some pictures/postcards of the city. I look forward to seeing them again in my city this year.

My last visit to CAT was spent at a teacher and artist training weekend. Here the participants were learning drama education techniques towards a qualification. During this time I realised that a lot of the theory was that of my own training (at the University of Northumbria) which is a rather small branch of arts training. I was keen to learn how these methods translated to the US. The people on the course were keen to talk to me about the theory behind this work, as it is an area of study they were immersed in through their training. One teacher told me how he had visited the UK expecting to be able to increase his knowledge and experience of arts education by visiting the country where most of the theory originated. However when in the UK he found little reference to the work in general circulation. I told him how arts education is a small pocket of the arts industry in the UK and does not hold a high profile. He was pretty shocked by this, when he compared how much work and profile that work has in the US. It was also turned out that Chris Vine was an old friend of my university tutors, who sometimes visit New York to

lecture, and who's work is held in high regard there, so this experience then came full circle for me, back to my own training days!



The CAT team

AMAS musical theatre – Greenwich Village, Manhattan, New York
Main contact: Mr Jan Hacha

AMAS are based in the bohemian surroundings of Greenwich village where they deliver outreach work to schools, refugee centres and community groups and run a young peoples academy, to provide opportunities in professional training for local young people AMAS develop new musical works which nurture new writers and actors. AMAS promote diverse works and multicultural castings.

In a loft off MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village is AMAS musical theatre. Perfectly suited to their kooky bohemian surroundings, AMAS is a hub of creativity. I met with Jan Hacha, the managing director (and his dog!) in their studio loft. Dedication to creating new works and providing opportunities for new writers, composers and actors is a major stand of the work they do. I was able to see a new work in development at one of their 6 o'clock theatre lab events, where they showcase works in development to an audience of interested supporters, who will give them feedback on what they saw. I went to a sing through of a new show called Burley Q, a gay comedy burlesque show. With a cast of 8 it was not small scale and was already providing work for these actors, just in these early stages. The company receive great reviews for their work from the mainstream arts industry in New York but seem to revel in working off the beaten track and creating new and exciting works which challenge the established arts scene.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we must all now stop enjoying ourselves and listen to some Sondheim” – Burley Q, AMAS, 2007

As well as producing new works AMAS (which is Latin for 'you love') they run theatre training for inner city young people at weekends. I went to the second youth theatre weekend of the new term. Here I watched 30 talented young people from all over the city receive professional theatre training in dance, drama and music through this scheme. They can be part of this training scheme for quite a few years, and by the time they are 20 or 21 they are ready to work in the professional theatre or apply to train further at performing arts colleges. The company also deliver in schools musical theatre

programmes to inner city schools and while I was there they were beginning a new project working with refugees in schools, using theatre to help them find their feet and voice in their new country.

The company have an ethos to encourage diverse and inclusive casting and encourage multicultural involvement in their works. To me this felt a little obvious, as multicultural and diverse working have been crucial to many arts practises in the UK for years, and it is a cornerstone of the Arts Council England, therefore very little arts work would be able to happen without it. However I discovered during my fellowship that New York is still a rather culturally segregated society in some areas. Whilst the UK has the Arts Council as the major governing and funding body of many arts organisations and practices, the US has no such body, and is therefore less likely to have common threads to arts practice, such as multicultural arts. The founder of AMAS Rosetta LeNoire (1911-2002) was a pioneering figure in American theatre, who encouraged people of all cultures to work together through performing arts. Her legacy is going strong to this day through AMAS.



AMAS Musical Theatre loft

Arts education Institute Utica, New York State.

Main contact: Ms Lesley Tillotson

4 hours out of New York City along the Hudson River is the city of Utica. In this former manufacturing town lies the Stanley Theatre which hosts the Arts Education Institute (AEI). The city was in decline with the end of the textile manufacturing industry but built itself up and continues to develop as an area cultural and social progression. There is a large refugee community in the City who's presence has helped reenergize the dwindling population. At the AEI they deliver wide ranging theatre, music and dance programmes to local schools and community groups. This includes workshop delivery, in school residencies, tours from professional artists and training programmes.

I travelled out of the city of New York for 4 days to visit Utica. Whist still in New York State it as a very different world to the City of New York. There was a slightly eerie feel about the city as it was encased by mountains of the

surrounding Mohawk Valley and the city itself had seen better days. It used to be a booming textile manufacturing city, the gangsters used to keep their molls here, the ballroom of the opulent hotel Utica had played host to Judy Garland, Franklin Roosevelt and Emila Earhart among others, but now it seemed rather quiet and the large boarded up houses in many of the streets I saw on the way into the city gave the impression the city was winding down. However I was pleased to discover I was very wrong the city is actually winding up in a big way! I was generously hosted in during my visit by Lesley Tillotson who is the education manager of the Arts Education Institute (AEI). The AEI are delivering arts programmes throughout the city, which involve teaching artists working in schools with staff and pupils to bring arts into the classroom. They host professional companies in the city to perform for young people and communities. I witnessed a fantastic dance programme coming to fruition while I was there. In the summer teachers from local schools had attended classes with Battleworks Dance Company. From this they were able to start introducing a dance programme to their pupils. Schools were then visited regularly all term by teaching artists, who created dance and music pieces with the pupils. After many weeks of work the pupils were then able to see Battleworks perform in their city at one of the Universities. Many of the pupils were able to identify their own dance experiences in the pieces they were watching. It was a total arts experience for the pupils which was ingrained in their day to day school life. The AEI invest in long term arts activity in their community and have a great relationship with artists, communities, young people, schools and universities. The AEI have a team of teaching artists specialising in dance, music or drama and I was lucky enough to spend time with these people to find out much about the life of a teaching artist in the US. The AIE is based in the Stanley Theatre an opulent structure from the glory days of theatre. The Stanley hosts a wide variety of performances from touring Broadway productions to ballet and schools programmes. The theatre was going through a major refurbishment when visited, to make it a world class arts venue and polishing up its grandeur! I was given a tour of the theatre to see the old and new parts merging together. For a some time stage manager like me I loved seeing the old film projectors from the 1920's and the theatres ancient boiler system (its odd the things I find interesting these days!). Then to marvel as I saw the work of doubling the size of its 1928 stage area ,and by cutting into the bedrock they will enable large touring shows to unload the scenery down a heated ramp, so they can work during the 5 months of snow they get each year. The arts organisations and community campaigners have worked tirelessly to make the theatre a beacon of arts in the city, and I hope I am able to visit again someday to see the final result (without having to wear a hard hat!)

Another unique trait of Utica was its new identity as a “city that loves refugees”. The city has a large refugee centre where many refugees are sent to when they arrive in the US. I visited the centre and met its manger who showed me rooms full of refugees from Belarus, Somalia, Cambodia, Viet Nam all learning English in classrooms. The week before I arrived over 80 Burmese had arrived in one week. This influx of people to the city has helped to increase the dwindling population and provided a unique and diverse mix of cultures to the city. One in 6 of the population of Utica is now a refugee. Of course there will always be challenges when faced with accommodating such

a large influx of people from mix of different cultures and Utica is not without these, but the city is adapting well by all accounts and the AEI are playing a part in helping integrate the refugees into their new community through arts projects.

I stayed at the hotel Utica during my visit (at a vastly reduced rate thanks to the AEI!) and for a while was transported back to the grandeur of how it must have been decades ago. And whilst I enjoyed staying there, revelling in its marble foyer with the chandeliers hanging above it is the future of the city of Utica which excites me and how the AEI and Stanley theatre will help shape that future.



Staff of the AEI, Lesley Tillotson and myself at Hamilton college for the Battleworks dance event

Kids Creative, Manhattan, New York City

Main contact: Mr Adam Jacobs

Kids Creative is a company who deliver drama programmes in schools through workshops, after school clubs and summer camps. They deliver work across the city to children to encourage participation in the arts and to use theatre to nurture peacemaking in youth.

I was able to visit a 'Kids Creative' after school session one afternoon at an elementary school in the Amsterdam area of the city. This session was part of an ongoing programme being run for children aged 6-9 in the school. New York schools are generally open before and after the regular school day and provide child care, some meals, clubs and activities for children who's parents may be working long hours. This can lead to the school day being very long for some children. This idea is now beginning to appear in UK schools too through the extended schools programme. It is hoped that sport and the arts will play a part in extended schools, delivering activities, but in the UK this has not yet been developed to any great extent compared to the work I saw going on in New York. Kids Creative work closely with a group of children once or twice a week for a term or sometimes a year to use drama activities to give children theatre experiences, a confidence boost and the chance to work with others. They may play drama games and then explore topics such as bullying through plays and activities. The company have an ethos to promote peacemaking through their work, so they may also look at empowering children through drama to tackle conflict between themselves and others in a

peaceful way. Whilst I saw only a small example of their work, the company were able to show me how they approached drama with these children, some of whom had challenging behaviours, and were very tired after a very long school day. In this example I saw the company worked in classrooms, which may have restricted what they are able to do with the children and not helped their workshop, as the children were restless and unfocused. As I have found in my work, the classroom can feel pretty suffocating after being in there for many hours and a change of environment to a hall or playground or even a different room can help drama work. However the company deliver a wide range of programmes and I saw only a tiny example of this work on my visit, and often they are restricted by what the school can offer them. The company also train new teaching artists and musicians to undertake education work, which is great to see such a long term commitment to this work from schools and this organisation.

Bronx Zoo – The Bronx, New York
Main contact: Mr Don Liowsy

The education and outreach work of the Bronx Zoo (and the network of other New York Zoos) deliver wide and varied conservation and education programmes for young people and families across the city. They also have their own theatre programme in place to deliver workshops direct to schools.

I visited the Bronx zoo after reading of the vast scope of education and outreach work done by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) who manage 5 Zoos across the city. While it may seem odd to have made this connection to zoos during my fellowship I was intrigued by the Zoos varied education programmes and also their unique theatre programme. I briefly worked for the education department at Chester Zoo in the UK and through that work I could see many opportunities for theatre and arts to be used to good effect in their conservation and education programmes but I found that opportunities for such work was very limited in the UK . I was therefore keen to learn more of how it worked in New York. I met with Don Liowsy, the education manager of the Bronx Zoo. In a particularly difficult borough of the city, I was interested to learn of the outreach and education work they offered to local schools. The WCS take their commitment to their local community seriously and offer many opportunities for local people to engage with the zoo and its programmes. This includes the zoo being free every Wednesday, in school programmes, youth clubs, virtual visits via computer links to the classrooms and a resident theatre company to go into schools. They also offer teacher training programmes and their own school sessions to link into all aspects of the curriculum to help raise achievement in exams. A lot of this work is possible due to how these programmes are funded, The state of New York funds some of this work as part of their education budget, which shows how these experiences are not viewed as an added extra to a schools curriculum, but as an integral part of making learning a practical experience as well as a classroom one. This is where there is an obvious difference in the way the education system in the UK and New York State are run. These programmes have proved an essential part of young peoples education and have proven to be successful in engaging young people in new experiences. Part of my

dissemination of the fellowship will be to contact my old employers at Chester Zoo and let them know about this work taking place in New York which I'm sure will interest them and maybe help them make their own links to the work of WCS in the future.

Other experiences/observations

One of the first things I learnt during my fellowship was what my job title should be. I am a teaching artist. In New York that is an established job title which describes the work of an arts education practitioner. It is not a title I have ever heard used in the UK but it describes perfectly what this job is. So at last I am able to know what I can call myself in an international field!

One particular area which stood out for me in New York was the amount of arts education work taking place across the city. It was also good to see that the grounding theory behind the work I do in the UK is an ideal method used across continents. I found myself sharing my own working practice, theories and ideas at nearly every place I visited.

One area of difference I discovered was in the difference which lay between mainstream theatre and education programmes. The large theatres of Broadway for example had no education programmes that I could see. This gulf between arts education and commercial theatre is one not unique to New York but it certainly is present there.

During my fellowship the Churchill name was met with much interest and respect. The legacy of Churchill and the aims of the fellowship programme were of great interest to many of the people I met during my time abroad. I also learnt from Chris Vine from CAT that his grandfather used to be Churchill's chauffeur, and he told me some interesting tales of his grandfathers work.

The legacy of the fellowship and conclusions

There was much interest in the work I do in the UK, and I found that by explaining it to others I was able to help define my own work better to myself and that will help me develop my work in the UK on the future.

As the aims of the Churchill fellowship state, I plan to keep in contact with people I met in New York and have already extended invitations for some of them to visit Liverpool and the UK in the future to learn about the work I do.

I have been given many ideas on how to progress my work in the future. I plan to continue to develop my own practice in arts education and also to explore how I can expand this work further through maybe running training and development programmes for other teaching artists.

An important outcome of this fellowship for me has been to renew my confidence in my work, and given me ideas and drive to develop my arts practice further in my city. I intend to use my fellowship experiences to continue developing my work, expanding my contacts and continuing my own learning of arts education.

Thanks

I would like to thank a number of people who have made this fellowship possible for me to undertake.

Firstly to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and staff who created this marvellous opportunity and who have been so very supportive in enabling this opportunity to happen. I am so thoroughly grateful to you.

Thanks to the people in New York who met with me and helped me gain so much during my fellowship, Don Liowsy, Adam Jacobs and Jan Hacha. Particular thanks to Lesley Tillitson and the AEI team in Utica and Chris Vine and the team at CAT for so generously and hospitably giving me their time and energies during my visit.

Thanks to Daria Price for providing me a fabulous home for the first 2 weeks of my stay in her city.

Thanks to Jan Bibby and staff at Bosco City learning centre in Liverpool for providing flexibility to enable me to undertake my fellowship, and for providing support and encouragement for my arts practice in Liverpool.

Finally, thanks to my wonderful family for their constant support and encouragement and especially to Velda and Barry (mum and dad) for their encouragement and for coming out to New York to join me for a while on my fellowship experience.

Further information

Further information on organisations I met with in New York can be found at the following websites.

CAT - www.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/academic_affairs/cat/index.html

AMAS - www.amasmusical.org

AEI Utica - www.cnyarts.com

Kids Creative - www.kidscreative.org

Bronx Zoo - www.bronxzoo.com/bz-education

Annex 1

Itinerary

6 th October 2007	Flew from Manchester to New York. Stay at apartment of Daria Price, Manhattan.
8 th October	Columbus Day – public holiday and parade
9 th October	Meeting with Chris Vine CAT Manhattan
13 th October	Actor Fest event, Manhattan Centre for Arts
14 th October	Culture Festival at Battery Park, Native American Dance performance at National Museum of the American Indian
16 th October	CAT high school programme at Washington Irving High school, Manhattan. 1/3 CAT youth theatres 4.00 -9.30pm
17 th October	Meeting with Jan Hacha at AMAS musical Theatre, Greenwich Village CAT junior Youth Theatre 4-6.30pm
18 th October	CAT high school programme at Washington Irving High school, Manhattan. 2/3 Kids Creative after school session at public school 191
19 th October	AMAS musical theatre; Burley Q showcase performance CAT high school programme at Washington Irving High school, Manhattan. 3/3
20 th October	Move to Astor on the Park hotel at Central Park
22 nd October	Meeting with Helen Wheelock CAT early arts programme director
23 rd October	Meeting with Don Liowsy and visit to Bronx Zoo
24 th October	Early arts programme visit at public school 6x, Bronx Preview performance of Young Frankenstein Musical, Hilton Theatre
25 th October	Early arts programme visit at public school 19x, Bronx 1/3 Performance of Cyrano De Bergerac at Richard Rodgers Theatre
26 th October	Early arts programme visit at public school 19x, Bronx 2/3
27 th October	AMAS musical theatre youth academy
28 th October	CAT professional development course
29 th October	Early arts programme visit at public school 19x, Bronx 3/3
30 th October	Depart New York on train for Utica city
31 st October	Meet Lesley Tillotson from AEI. Meet with local teaching artists for coffee. Meet education director of Central New York Arts Council. Tour of Stanley theatre. Visit Mohawk Valley resource centre for refugees. Visit arts centre.
1 st November	Visit Hamilton college for Battleworks dance performances Visit Mohawk Valley Performing arts institute for dance Master classes with Battleworks dance. Dinner with local teaching artists
2 nd November	Visit Hamilton College for schools visits to dance performances. Depart Utica for New York City
4 th November	CAT professional development student reviews Performance of Curtains at Al Hirschfeld theatre
7 th November	Return to UK