

<b>Institution:</b> Edge Hill University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 – English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Tackling societal issues through engaged theatre		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014-2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Kim Wiltshire	Senior Lecturer	Sept 2011 – present
Billy Cowan	Senior Lecturer	Sept 2013 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2018		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>From 2013 onwards Wiltshire and Cowan have carried out research on the theory and collaborative practices, processes and techniques explored and utilised by political theatre and theatre for social change makers over the last fifty years. This research has been applied in the writing, production and performance of a number of plays addressing a range of key societal and cultural issues. Through performances of the plays, workshops centred around the subject matter, and <b>development of relationships</b> with key external organisations such as the NHS, the NUT, the TUC, the Proud Trust, social housing and local councils, the plays <b>led to</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increased understanding and awareness of key social issues facing young people (primarily homophobia and bullying, online pornography, and unemployment) amongst educational and health professionals, young people and the general public.</li> <li>2. Enhanced professional development by helping education and health workers to reflect on their own practices.</li> <li>3. Increased confidence and self-esteem amongst young people who were involved in the creation of the plays and audiences who saw the plays and participated in specifically designed workshops around the topics.</li> </ol>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Cowan and Wiltshire's research (undertaken in the period 2013-2018) into 'theatre for social change' practices and processes of UK political theatre companies and practitioners working primarily between the years 1968 and 2018 was brought together in the book <i>Scenes from the Revolution: Making Political theatre 1968-2018</i> [reference 4]. The publication highlights three major findings regarding political theatre processes that Cowan and Wiltshire have adopted over a number of years in their own theatre making. These relate to the audiences for the plays, the process of creating the play alongside the central issue that sparked the creative idea:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issues – the content of the play has to emerge from the community groups being worked with. Whilst the playwright may have a general idea of what the subject might be, they must be open to the specifics highlighted by the group. All the plays in this case study had current, relevant societal issues at their core, but used relatable stories to pose the questions to the audience.</li> <li>• Process – process has to be meaningful and empowering to those who are affected by the issue. So rather than act as individual playwrights, Cowan and Wiltshire researched, workshoped and collaborated with relevant groups to create the content of the plays mentioned in this case study.</li> <li>• Audience – rather than general audiences sitting 'in the dark, watch[ing] a political display' (Wiltshire &amp; Cowan, 2018, p,226) audiences that were invested in the issue were actively sought out – for example, young people's groups and sexual health workers for <i>Project XXX</i>, high school pupils and teachers for <i>Care Takers</i> and the TUC for <i>The Value of Nothing</i></li> </ul> <p>These ideas, techniques and theories (references 4 &amp; 5 below) were utilised, tested and refined by Cowan and Wiltshire to script and produce their own plays for social change (references 2&amp;3 below). Their research (archival and fieldwork) informed how the plays were created, the</p>		

aesthetic form of the pieces and the participatory/collaborative nature of the research undertaken to generate content. Fieldwork included interviews and workshops with educational professionals, teachers and pupils in secondary schools (reference3); health care professionals and young people aged between 13-21 based in the North West (reference 2) and interviews and workshops with young, unemployed people across Greater Manchester (reference2). These helped to generate original content that enabled engagement. Specific details about the research processes undertaken during each project:

**Project XXX** by Kim Wiltshire and Paul Hine

This project began with the question: 'What if, when Romeo met Juliet, he wanted to film their first time and upload it for the world to see?' The question was inspired by the popular media's coverage of young people's use of online pornography and work with sexual health services in Manchester.

- Community/Youth Theatre drama workshops with young people in Manchester, Crewe and Bolton, working with a total of 47 participants (See Reference 1 detailing the full process) Substantial academic research, presenting the project at conferences including the Pornified Conference in December 2011 and at the Edge Hill University GenSex Research group in May 2012. (see Project XXX evaluation report in the evidence section)
- An applied theatre creative process, devising and improvising around workshop findings.

**The Value of Nothing** by Kim Wiltshire

- A project, supported by Bolton Octagon theatre, inspired by an interview on Radio 4's *Today* during the 2015 general election campaign, where David Cameron claimed the 'hard working British taxpayer' did not want to fund worklessness', so a Conservative government would set up initiatives to get people back into work.
- 16 creative workshops run with young men in Bolton living on benefits, with families living in social housing in Bolton and with young people living in supported housing in Manchester, totalling 28 participants, as well as interviewing 6 community artists about their work.
- An applied theatre creative process involving devising and improvising with the participants and professional actors around workshop findings.

**Care Takers** by Billy Cowan

Research was undertaken because of a 2014 report undertaken by Stonewall that found that 36 per cent of secondary school teachers had heard homophobic language from other school staff, and almost 86 per cent of teachers said pupils in their schools had experienced homophobic bullying. They also found that only 17 per cent of teachers have received training on tackling homophobic bullying. Cowan wanted to explore the possible consequences of these on teachers and pupils.

- A research process of structured interviews with teachers and pupils across Manchester, Rochdale and Macclesfield, particularly Falinge High School in Rochdale, helped generate original material.
- Consultative interviews with education academics Dr Dawne Irving-Bell and Dr David Wolfe at Edge Hill University, to help generate material and ensure it was accurate in terms of policy and practices.
- Researching the findings of Stonewall's Schools' Report 2012 and Teachers' Report 2014 into homophobia in schools. This aided Cowan in the writing of an original play that highlighted the risks to young LGBT secondary school pupils of ineffective anti-bullying policies and procedures and homophobic teachers.
- The research also showed the specific difficulties faced by teachers in dealing with homophobic bullying and sex education in *multi-cultural, inner city schools* were sex education has to compete with 'higher priorities' such as the teaching of British Values as part of the government's Prevent strategy,

**3. References to the research**

- [1] Wiltshire, Kim (2015) Project XXX - using multimedia theatre to explore sexual and emotional issues. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, 6 (1). pp. 33-45. doi: [10.1386/jaah.6.1.33\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jaah.6.1.33_1)
- [2] Wiltshire, K & Hine, P. Project XXX (Aurora Metro 2014) and Wiltshire, K the Value of Nothing (Aurora Metro 2017) plus performances.

[3] Cowan, Billy *Care Takers* (Aurora Metro, 2016) plus performances.

[4] Wiltshire, Kim and Billy Cowan, eds. *Scenes from the Revolution: Making Political Theatre (1968-2018)* London: Pluto Press with Edge Hill University Press (2018)

[5] Wiltshire, Kim (2015) *Writing for Theatre: Creative and Critical Approaches*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. ISBN 978 1 137 36919 2

References 1, 4 and 5 were peer reviewed and went through a rigorous editing process. A favourable review of Ref 4 appeared in *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol 36. Issue 4 (Nov. 2020): "A highly recommended and lively resource ... one that will prove inspiring for scholars and practitioners alike."4 was further endorsed by Baz Kershaw, Emeritus Professor of Theatre and Performance, University of Warwick, "Editor/authors Kim Wiltshire and Billy Cowan forge an original and powerfully mind-bending take across 50 years of radicalised performing. Essential territory for driving future performance toward politicised hope."

#### 4. Details of the impact

Combined, the three plays have performed in 24 venues, had a total live audience reach of 2410, and an online audience of 6,400. The performances have collectively benefitted those performing and attending the shows in the following ways:

##### 1. Increasing the understanding and awareness of key social issues facing young people (homophobia, bullying, pornography, unemployment) amongst educational and health professionals, and the general public.

**Project XXX** raised awareness amongst the audiences and commissioning organisations about the societal and personal issues surrounding online pornography.

- In March 2014 Rotherham Council's young people's service contracted the show and a workshop to explore the issue more deeply. Examples of feedback noted from audience discussions included the comment: *It raised awareness about porn and the dangers. It also helped me understand the dangers of sexting* [source 8]
- After seeing the performance Cheshire East Council's Arts Team commissioned Wiltshire to use the performance as a stimulus for the design of a series of leaflets looking at aspects of sexual health and body image. The work was commissioned by Cheshire East Council and facilitated by LIME (part of Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust). The leaflets were distributed by Cheshire East Council to schools across Cheshire for young people from the ages of 14 onwards extending the reach of impact. [source 1,2]
- Education Director of The Dukes in Lancaster stated: *The Young Company found it to be a relevant, informative, humorous and well-balanced portrayal of relationships and sexual exploitation in young people.* [source 5a]
- Because of the subject matter there was a wide variety of media interest and reviews [Source 2]. Elizabeth Newman, Artistic Director of Bolton Octagon Theatre, said (prior to the scratch performance of Project XXX): *'I just want to say, before I stop talking, on behalf of the Octagon, we feel so lucky to have spent these three days working on this play because the entire organization feels that it's such an important story and has a really important theme and has many issues that need to be discussed right now, not only for young people but for all of us.'* [source 9]

**Care Takers** performed to 1531 audience members in Edinburgh, Manchester, Ormskirk, Brighton, Salford, Rochdale, Liverpool, Oldham and Seville, Spain and in doing so raised awareness of homophobic bullying, ineffectual school policies and discussions around fundamental British values.

- Survey and findings in reports [source 6] produced by Truant company detail the specific feedback from audience members that prove this impact claim. There were 78 responses, and the following comment was typical: *Audience7096: 'The play was beautifully put together. I feel that it can be used as a resource to showcase the impacts and effects that homophobic bullying has. They play both frustrated me but also made me feel good knowing that awareness is being raised.'*
- The play was widely reviewed in the media, particularly with regard to its social commentary and challenging themes, [source 7], won a Stage Edinburgh Award, and was cited in the Stage's Critics' Choice of best plays at the Festival. A reviewer

commented that this was, “**an intellectually stimulating and emotionally engaging production that seeks broader truths while navigating an ethically knotty plot.**”

After a special performance for young people at M6 Theatre Company, one of the leading young peoples’ theatre companies in the country, Caroline Kennedy, their participatory programme manager stated, “The play had been impactful in raising awareness and increasing understanding of how secondary schools deal with bullying and homophobia within the playground and more importantly the staffroom (a world that is usually closed off to young people)”. [source 4]

- Data collected as part of the play’s evaluation report show clearly how the play raised key areas of discussion amongst its audiences, as well as increasing awareness of key issues. Of those who saw the play 70% said they now understand what is meant by British values more clearly (before the play 78% either did not understand or only partly understood the meaning of the phrase). 95% of people (non-teachers) think teachers need training on how to tackle homophobic bullying. [source 6]

**The Value of Nothing** toured during 2017 and was also supported by Bolton Octagon.

- A review of the play from Live Art Alive, shows the impact of the show on its audiences: “*This is a performance with a genuine social conscience which seeks to address some major issues around unemployment, poverty and the opportunities open to us dependent upon social class and education. It certainly provides food for thought.*” [source 7]

## 2. Enhancing professional development by helping educational and health workers to reflect on their own practices

**Project XXX:** After seeing the production and realising how impactful the play could be in raising awareness and understanding, the head of the NHS Sexual Health team in Manchester bought in a performance for staff and contracted Wiltshire to organise the 2014 Sexual Health Workers conference in Manchester. “*The show was an excellent vehicle to explore the contentious issue of young people, sexuality and pornography. It was written with knowledge, sensitivity but also challenged its audience.... It generated discussions amongst, young people, frontline staff, commissioners and key stakeholders. Likewise, the conference had significant impact upon all who attended, and this was in the main due to Kim and her team’s input, who were professional, very knowledgeable and able to raise questions and discussions in a safe yet challenging way.*” [source 2]

- **Care Takers:** As a result of feedback from teachers, the play was contracted by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) as professional development for their NQTs at their Young Teachers’ Conferences (2016 and 2017) with 199 NQTs watching the play. The then president of the NUT, Louise Regan, reported that “*The insights offered by the play and Billy’s research have had an impact on the teachers who have seen it, and will affect the way they deal with professional conflict and bullying within their schools*” [source 3]
- The play was performed at the Secondary Education Partnership Conference 2016 at Edge Hill University for 50 PGCE trainee teachers with one teacher saying: ‘*Excellent play, it really resonated with me as a new teacher. How my actions are important and how serious issues such as this can become without proper intervention.*’ [source 6a]
- The play performed at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Health and Humanities Conference in Seville in 2016, which brought together 100 arts and health practitioners and academics involved in the care industries. It was used as an example of a health arts project that raised important questions about ‘care’ and how to ‘care’ for young people in the secondary school system. The conference convener said, ‘*this play gets where other messages do not.*’ [source 6a]
- Before the play 73% of teachers in the audiences reported previously having had to deal with homophobic bullying in their schools. After seeing the play, 71.4% of teachers thought the play was a good way of teaching trainee teachers about how to deal with homophobic bullying as well as giving them important insights into workloads, time pressures and working relationships [source 6b].

### 3. Increasing confidence and self-esteem amongst young people who were involved in the creation of the plays and/or who saw the plays and participated in specifically designed workshops around the subject matters of the plays.

Cowan's and Wiltshire's work increased confidence and self-esteem and allowed young people and the wider communities a chance to voice their opinions both as research participants and audience members.

**Project XXX** ran special performances at Bury Met, MMU in Crewe, Bolton Octagon and The Lantern in Liverpool that were accompanied by pre- and post-show workshops that explored the ideas around the subject of online pornography. The show was subsequently commissioned by The Dukes Theatre in Lancaster to be performed for their young actors' company. From seeing this production, Rotherham Council commissioned the company to perform the show for their young people, again with workshops run by Wiltshire and the cast. Feedback from young people included: *"I've learned more about sex and relationships in this short play than I ever have at school."* *"the play was good and helped me understand the dangers of online sexting"* *"I thought the play was good for raising awareness on the dangers of porn. Young people could learn a lot from this"* [source 8]

**Care Takers:** Closed performances in a safe space for young LGBT people took place for the Proud Trust, a Manchester LGBT charity, and M6 Theatre Company, Rochdale. Feedback from young audience members suggested the play had affected their understanding of how homophobia is dealt with in school systems by staff [source 6]:

- Audience 9082: *'[It] really made us think more about the rules and regulations in place ... [and] gave me a new understanding of the flaws of the school system and the education system in place at the moment.'*
- Audience 9660: *'Homophobia is not acceptable in any situation, but Mrs Rutter (the deputy head) did have valid points ... But she did need to listen to Ms Lawson (the new teacher) [who] ... should have leap frogged to the Head to get her point across.'*
- Audience 6877: *'... this isn't how they (the teachers/deputy headteachers etc) should be dealing with things.'*

After the closed performance and post-show discussions with the young people at M6 Theatre Company, the Outreach Manager and leader of the group said it was clear that "The play ... gave the young people a safe environment in which to discuss issues they themselves had experienced at school related to issues of sexuality and homophobia. This was a cathartic and empowering experience for the young people in the group." [source 4]

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Corroborating Statement from Director of Lime Arts, Manchester NHS University Trust
2. Corroborating Statement from Manager of Manchester NHS Sexual Health Team
3. Corroborating Statement from, Former President of the NUT (when the play was shown)
4. Corroborating Statement from, Participatory Programme Manager at M6 Theatre Company.
5. Arts Council England Evaluation reports
  - a) Project XXX
  - b) Value of Nothing
  - c) Care Takers
6. *Care Takers:* a) Survey and b) findings report for Stonewall and Teachers
7. Reviews and editorials
8. Project XXX Rotherham Audience Discussions
9. Transcript of recording from Bolton Octagon Artistic Director