

Institution: Keele University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA20 Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Ages and Stages: The Place of Theatre in the Lives of Older People		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2009-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Miriam Bernard	Professor of Social Gerontology	1988 – 1994, 1997 - 2018
Professor David Amigoni	Professor of Victorian Literature	1995 - present
Professor Michael Murray	Professor of Social/Health Psychology	2006 - 2018
Dr Lucy Munro	Senior Lecturer in English	2004 - 2013
Michelle Rickett	Research Associate	2009 - 2014
Jackie Reynolds	Research Associate	2013 & 2015 - 2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Ages and Stages, an ongoing interdisciplinary research collaboration between Keele and the New Vic Theatre (Staffordshire), explores the relationship between perceptions and experiences of ageing and creativity. Engaged interdisciplinary research has mobilised the arts in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, challenging perceptions of decline in later life and benefitting both older and other community members in the region. The research collaboration has established a thriving elders' Theatre Company, influenced the creative and outreach work of the New Vic, and benefitting other arts and community organisations through programmes of workshops, performances, an annual arts festival and extensive outreach work.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Through a series of linked projects, the research explored the impact of theatre on perceptions and experiences of ageing and creativity. An interdisciplinary team, led by Bernard, worked with the New Vic, an award-winning theatre that engages 150,000 people annually through performances and community programmes. Participatory theatre has long been used to address issues affecting excluded groups, however theatre has been an underutilised medium for conveying positive messages about growing older. This research exposed this gap in knowledge and challenged the stereotypical ideas that people's creative capacity declined in later life through exploring older people's participation in theatre and drama (3.1).</p> <p>In 2009, the research team took project forward through <i>Ages and Stages</i>, funded by the cross-council New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) Programme. The project interviewed 95 older people, held ten focus groups and analysed the theatre's archives, examining its role in the lives of older people living in Stoke and Staffordshire and its representations of ageing since the 1960s (3.1,</p>		

3.2). This culminated in *Our Age, Our Stage*, the New Vic's intergenerational documentary performance involving members of the New Vic's Youth Theatre and 16 older interviewees, performed in community venues and to an audience of 500 on the theatre's main stage (2012). The Ages and Stages team also worked with a partner project at the University of Alberta, Canada, exploring the impact of theatre participation on older people's health.

This research and its outcomes opened a dialogue between older people, gerontologists, humanities researchers and arts practitioners. This was consolidated through an AHRC funded Late-Life Creativity research network (2011-2013) led by Amigoni, broadening the focus of the inquiry by analysing the impact of ageing on other art forms (3.3). In 2012, *Ages and Stages* received AHRC follow-on funding to translate its findings into practical outcomes. In 2013-14, further AHRC funding enabled new research assessing the cultural value of older people's participation in theatre making, using the now established Ages and Stages Theatre Company as a case study (3.4, 3.5).

Key Research Findings

- Age-related stereotypes influence decisions by older amateurs and professionals to stop creative work. (3.1). This research (and thriving activities of the Ages and Stages Theatre Company), challenge negative stereotypes about declining creativity in later life (3.1, 3.3, 3.5).
- Participating in drama benefits the self-esteem, self-confidence and vitality of older people. Theatre provides a forum for positive challenge, giving people confidence to develop new skills and take risks (3.1, 3.2).
- Benefits are particularly apparent during times of transition (3.1, 3.3, 3.5), for example retirement or bereavement (3.1).
- Late-life creativity is specific to particular communities of practice, with place and local community playing a key role in older people's experiences of theatre participation (3.1, 3.3).
- Beyond the health and well-being benefits (3.1, 3.3, 3.4), cultural value of theatre making and artistic participation for older people is complex and context specific. Such participation has an intrinsic value because participating in drama affects people's subjective experiences, and leads to new relationships and opportunities (3.1, 3.4, 3.5).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Bernard, M., Rickett, M., Amigoni, D., Munro, L., Murray, M. & Rezzano, J. (2015) 'Ages and Stages: the place of theatre in the lives of older people', *Ageing and Society*, 35(6), 1119-1145. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X14000038> (published online 10 March 2014).
- 3.2 Murray, M., Amigoni, D., Bernard, M., Newman, A., Rickett, M., Tew, P. & Warren, L. (2014) 'Understanding and transforming ageing through the arts', Chapter 3 in Walker, A. (ed) *The New Science of Ageing*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- 3.3 Amigoni, D. (2019) 'The Late Peter Rice: Late-Style Stories of ageing and the city in 'A Bright Past for Stoke-on-Trent' in Amigoni, D and McMullan, G. (eds.) *Creativity in Later Life: Beyond Late Style*, New York and London: Routledge.
- 3.4 Bernard, M. & Rickett, M. (2016) 'The Cultural Value of Older People's Experiences of Theater-making: A Review', *The Gerontologist* (accepted for publication April 20th 2016). <https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/57/2/e1/2631952>
- 3.5 Reynolds, J., Bernard, M., Rezzano, J. and Rickett, M. (2016) 'Ageing, Drama and Creativity: translating research into practice', *Gerontology and Geriatrics Education*, Special Issue on 'Humanities and Arts in Gerontology and Geriatrics Education'. Advance Access, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02701960.2016.1152267>

This research is internationally recognised for originality, significance and rigour, being published in leading peer reviewed journals in the field. This quality is also indicated by the numerous grants that have supported this work, principally from research councils, including: NDA Programme Award (£372,513 + £51,510 studentship, 2009-2012); Canadian Institutes of Health Research/New Dynamics of Ageing Supplemental Grant, named collaborator (\$225,000, 2010-2013); AHRC Network Grant, PI David Amigoni (£28,530 2011-2013); AHRC Follow-on Funding, PI Miriam Bernard (£116,156 2012-2013); AHRC Cultural Value Project award, PI Miriam Bernard

(£35,444, 2013-2014); AHRC Cultural Value Project Award (£28,028, 2014). The research and impact were also highlighted as an ESRC case study in 2018: <https://esrc.ukri.org/news-events-and-publications/impact-case-studies/research-on-age-and-creativity-sparks-new-theatre-company-and-festival/>

Related funding includes two-year continuation awards for the New Vic with Keele University collaborators: from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (£60,000) for a 'Live Age Engage' outreach programme; and 'Live Age Connects', from the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund (£90,000). These have expanded research-informed outreach work into new community groups: including a creative group for adults living with dementia and another for older people isolated due to economic disadvantage.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Research from the AHRC follow-on project (2012-2013) delivered several strands of activity including **establishing an elders' theatre group and annual festival**: Ages and Stages Theatre Company (since 2016) and the annual Live Age (LA) Festival from 2014. Research findings on the importance of locality, place and community through late-life creativity led directly to the introduction of the first festival, in which over 3000 people have since participated. LA is one of the longest running creative age festivals in the UK and has increased opportunities for underrepresented community members: in 2014, 50% of attendees had participated in fewer than two arts events in the previous year (5.1); by 2016, this proportion had reduced to 30% (5.2). In 2017, LA expanded into a two-year community programme - *Meet Me at Live Age* – with company members working with Keele academics and artists to deliver community-based programmes for older people.

Influencing creative practice and extending reach

The research into engaging older people in drama has shaped the work of the New Vic, artists and community organisations, leading to new creative practices and skills that have benefitted company members, creative practitioners and community co-producers. The Ages and Stages Theatre Company, hosted by the New Vic, has an intergenerational ethos, governance structure and intergenerational training programme this has been singled out as being a significant social impact by the NDA project evaluation team (5.3). Since 2013, the Company has gained recognition, creating 8 new productions performed across the UK. Their founding production - 'Our Age, Our Stage' - was distributed through 500 DVDs in 2014 (5.3). The Company has performed by invitation at prestigious venues, including the Royal Exchange Theatre (Manchester) and West Yorkshire Playhouse (Leeds) (5.4). The Baring Foundation highlighted its work in a report on elders' theatre companies (5.3), in 2018, the Live Age Festival hosted the Northern Elders' Theatre Network. In 2019, the Company performed in the opening ceremony for Latitude Festival (Suffolk), which attracted 40,000 people across four days.

Enhancing relationships and skills resulting in enhancement of quality of life

The New Vic has observed "real change taking place in the lives of older people" (5.4), including considerable benefits for members and communities. Company members report a range of benefits (new relationships, enhanced well-being, and affective impacts) (5.5, 5.6). Company members received 432 hours of formal training as Ambassadors for *Meet me at Live Age*, supporting the programme through a total of 460 hours of volunteer time (5.7). For one retired volunteer, training as an Ambassador "has given me the opportunity to take the skills I have gained from Ages and Stages and use them to work in the wider community with disadvantaged adults and people with high needs" (5.7). Overall, 54% of those participating in *Meet Me at Live Age* were not taking part in any other cultural engagement; and 83% reported living with conditions that limited their daily activities (5.7). One individual commented: 'I was getting very reclusive with being on my own...they've given me some incentive to get out of the house and mix'. (5.8).

Practices have changed in arts and community organisations

Theresa Heskins (Artistic Director, New Vic) describes how this research "had a transformative effect not only on how we work creatively with older people but on how we approach the

participation of our communities across a range of projects" (5.4). As a result of the research, the theatre has changed the way it plans and delivers outreach projects. Benefits for the theatre include new marketing insights, better understanding of older audiences, more opportunities for shows representing older people, and financial gains (5.5). Bernard, with Rezzano, secured additional funding to support the Company - over £5000 in 2016-17 and £99,975 from the Arts Council England and Baring Foundation funded *Celebrating Age* programme for *Meet Me at Live Age* (2017) and through this expanded its outreach work (to harder to reach groups) and collaboration capacity (5.7).

Organisations beyond the New Vic have benefitted from participating in LA and *Meet Me at Live Age*. LA led to new partnerships with Front Line Dance (5.9) and funding for the British Ceramics Biennial to support its intergenerational training programme. A representative from a dementia charity whose staff participated in *Meet Me at Live Age* reported that the programme increased staff confidence (5.8). The programme increased the co-creative capacity of the ten artistic practitioners involved (5.8, 5.7). One reflected "*it's the first time I've used improvisation in this way with this age of dancers... [I was] completely blown away by their response...*" (5.8).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Jackie Reynolds, Nicola Gratton and Miriam Bernard, Live Age 2014 Evaluation Report (2014) https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/22d747_758d293c1fd54646bff8507ad8f46cd5.pdf

5.2 Live Age Evaluations (2015&2016) - Keele University, 'Live Age Festival 2015: Evaluation Report' (2015)

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/22d747_4bc7d9fd6346436fb383459a0b1be3f1.pdf; Keele University, 'Live Age Festival 2016: Evaluation Slides' (2016)

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/22d747_0cf30f00ec494a80bc59589c4a7c00f2.pdf

<https://www.bjf.org.uk/blog/2016/07/live-age-2016-press-release>

5.3 National Development Team for Inclusion, 'Evaluating the Impact of the New Dynamics of Ageing Research Programme' (August 2015) <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/research/research-and-impact-evaluation/evaluating-the-impact-of-the-new-dynamics-of-ageing-research-programme-final-report/>

5.4 Theresa Heskins (Artistic Director, New Vic Theatre) and Jill Rezzano (Head of Education, New Vic Theatre), Testimonial letter (30 November 2016)

5.5 Kate Organ, 'The Baring Foundation, A New Form of Theatre: Older People's Involvement in Theatre and Drama' (2016) <https://cdn.baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/OlderPeople%E2%80%99sTheatre.pdf>

5.6 Miriam Bernard, Jill Rezzano and The Ages and Stages Theatre Company' *Ages and Stages: The Cultural Value of Older People's Experiences of Theatre Making* (2014)

5.7 New Vic Theatre, *Celebrating Age Full Project Report* (2019)

5.8 Meet Me at Live Age, Video (2018)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnbwBXILKHU&feature=youtu.be> (download held within Keele's repository)

5.9 Meet Me at Live Age, Year One Artist Case Studies (2018)