



Theatres of Learning

A proposal for empty spaces
in Britain's town centres

I. Theatres of Learning

Big Wide Talk Theatres of Learning put children centre stage as a starting point for real discussion between parents and practitioners about what children need. Parental engagement is known to drive better outcomes for children in their development generally and Theatres of Learning maximise this. Big Wide Talk Theatres of Learning also create a focus for wider community involvement across the generations, providing opportunities for volunteering and further education as well as sessional employment in a range of skills. They also serve as a touchstone for the future, encouraging local people to see the strengths they have in common.

Theatres of Learning are popular in both rural and urban environments and attract participation over a wide area. The links to local investment are clear, as children, their parents and their practitioners take part and explore parts of the city or town previously unfamiliar. Theatres of Learning emphasise links to local businesses and companies, as they interact with the economic and social contexts in which children prosper.

Funding is possible from all manner of sources: sponsorship in cash and in kind; charitable grants; direct provision of services for children and families, community development, community safety and others, including culture and sport; central government grants, including the Arts Council and The Big Lottery Fund.

Big Wide Talk has recognised expertise in aspects of delivery, promotion, follow up, operations and health and safety. Our health and safety record is second to none, as is our reputation for design and creativity.

We are based in Cambridge and over the downturn Big Wide Talk is keen to apply its skills in a collective effort to reshape the future with a greater emphasis on the role that bringing up children can have at the heart of the economy. New relationships that invigorate and redefine the reconciliation of family and employment can contribute to sustainability and a fairer sharing of the country's wealth in terms of social and economic capital.

Big Wide Talk is therefore seeking local partnerships to realise this ambition. We have the support of the City Council, the County Council, many local schools and parents groups, as well as leading politicians including David Howarth and Ed Miliband, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.



Cloth Place Farmyard

Big Wide Talk is a strictly not for profit organisation, which reaches out to and speaks with children, parents and practitioners where they live and work, strategically connecting them to government.

Big Wide Talk is dedicated to documenting debate about children's lives regardless of race, religion, politics or gender and to raising awareness about needs and the ways in which they can be addressed.

Front Cover & Left: Plymouth Guildhall, 'Looking Again, Lighting Again, Learning Again' (see centre spread for details.)



'Exhibition Expedition' (2 days)
 Venue: **Truman Breweries**, Brick Lane, London
 Funding Partners: The Gatsby Charitable Foundation; European Union ESF
 151 children, 122 adults



The Spotlight Room, Truman Breweries



Cloth Cafe, Hob Moor Primary School

'Going Up Going Down' (2 weeks)
 Venue: **Hob Moor Primary School**, York
 Funding Partners: Hob Moor Asset Club; York City Council
 943 children, 406 adults

'Touching Talking Texting' (2 days)
 & **'The Avonmouth Clothplace'** (1 week)
 Venue: **Avonmouth Community Centre**, Bristol
 400 children, 300 adults



Touching Talking Texting*



Lookout Tower, Bank Leaze Primary School

'Looking Out Looking In' (2 weeks)
 Venue: **Bank Leaze Primary School**, Bristol
 Funding Partners: Avonmouth Asset Club; Bristol City Council
 & **'Enabling Achievement: Parents make it happen'** (1 day)
 Venue: Freshways Family Resource Centre, Bristol
 958 children, 287 adults

'Looking Lighting Learning' (2 weeks)
 Venue: **Royal William Yard Cooperage**, Plymouth
 Funding Partners: Urban Splash; South West Regional Development Agency; Plymouth City Council; Torbay Council
 & **'Looking again Lighting Again Learning Again'** (3 days)
 Venue: **The Guildhall**, Plymouth
 Funding Partners: Plymouth City Council
 1500 children, 840 adults



The Cloth Shop, Royal William Yard



Juicing, New Hall Theatre

'Tiverton Talks' (3 weeks)
 Venue: **New Hall Theatre**, Tiverton
 Funding Partners: Tiverton Learning Community; Devon County Council; Mid Devon District Council; Tiverton Children's Centre
 1500 children, 350 adults

'Our New School' (2 weeks)
 Venue: **Richard Lander School**, Truro
 Funding Partners: Cornwall County Council; Cornwall Children and Young People's Partnership
 2500 children, 900 adults



The Big Red Chair, Richard Lander School



The Shoebox, The Brickworks

'The Colourbox' (2 weeks)
 Venue: **The Brickworks, Manor Community College**, Cambridge
 Funding Partners: University of Cambridge Office of External Affairs and Communications; the Institute of Physics
 1502 children, 627 adults

'Countess Chestnut Country Market' (2 weeks)
 Venue: **Countess Wear Primary School**, Exeter
 Funding Partners: Devon County Council
 431 children, 152 adults



The Lettershop, Countess Wear Primary School



The Winter Gardens, Morecambe

'The Morecambe Bay Theatre of Learning'
 Venue: **The Winter Gardens**, Morecambe
 Funding Partners: Big Lottery Fund
 (November/December 2009)

II. Venues

Big Wide Talk has used all manner of buildings for its Theatres of Learning. The Cooperage Building at Royal William Yard was a Grade II listed building, part of an Urban Splash development awaiting restoration - but the space and the light were fantastic, and we did whatever it took to make the building a safe and exciting space for 1500 children. Richard Lander School in Truro was given to us after the student body moved to their new school. Again, we were able to think through the possibilities and create a huge farmyard in the old school hall; a complete Colourbox occupying the sports hall, the drama classrooms and the dance studio; the school kitchen became a Cloth Kitchen adjacent to the Cloth Cafe; the library became the Supermarket, Laundrette and Faith Place. We have not filled an aeroplane hangar yet but we'd certainly try! We are extremely keen to run a Cambridge Cloth Place as soon as possible: with the right space we could run this for two weeks towards the end of June. The space would need to be no less than 700 square metres. Once we have a site, we juggle what is possible with what is affordable.

III. Set up

Although employing subcontractors to help with set up and take down, Big Wide Talk does the bulk of the work in-house, thereby effecting a stunning integration of purpose, practice and design. Typically Big Wide Talk will agree a venue after several site visits, checking on space, throughput of people, and safety and fitness for purpose. Thereafter Big Wide Talk staff will control all aspects of set up, take down and operation ensuring the highest standards at all times. A detailed health and safety document is drawn up and posted on the Big Wide Talk website for all to see.

Great attention to detail ensures professional standards. Theatres of Learning have often been run in buildings with few facilities and sometimes large safety issues to overcome, but in every instance the vision has been brought to life with wit and imagination. There is nothing amateurish about these events, from basic design and set up, to the publicity and teaching materials produced.

IV. Widening participation

Each Theatre of Learning is filmed and the film is used as a prompt for reflection between parents and practitioners. The resultant research stories are published on the Big Wide Talk website - www.bigwidetalk.org - and presented at seminars, conferences and local decision making forums. This brings community development and participation into the public eye and gives those who take part a sense of having the right to initiate change for themselves, and their children's futures. Over recent times, Big Wide Talk has arranged and conducted seminars with Ed Miliband and Polly Toynbee that were unreservedly praised.

V. Health & Safety

Big Wide Talk is rigorous in its approach to health and safety, and has senior management experience in all aspects. This is reflected in the comprehensive policy documents prepared for each Theatre of Learning. Our record in this area is excellent.

Big Wide Talk has the following insurance:

Employers Liability - £10,000,000

Public Liability - £5,000,000

Professional Indemnity - £1,000,000

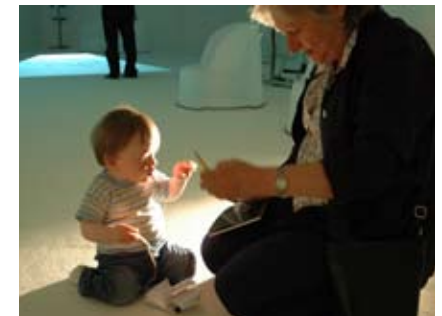
VI. Theatres of Learning for Cambridge City Centre

Our aim in Cambridge will be to continuously bring the work to public attention, thereby securing a virtuous cycle of endeavour, enterprise and engagement. At this moment in time, Big Wide Talk is seeking a partnership with the City Council to have a city centre base from which Theatres of Learning can be organised. We need office and some storage space as well as meeting space, and we need venues. Venues can change as city centre spaces become vacant. Theatres of Learning always run for at least two weeks, but with a city centre venue we would prefer to run for longer periods. There is enormous flexibility, although it is important to work within school term dates. We are meeting with a representative from the Grafton Centre and welcome all discussion.

Theatres of Learning will not only bring children, their families and those who work with them into the city, they will bring the irrepressible energy and creativity of children and young people into the commercial heart of the city in disciplined and rigorous partnership.

* Touching Talking Texting: this Theatre of Learning began as a request from local parents to replicate some of our work at the very local level. We began with the Avonmouth Cloth Place, which produced an avalanche of emergent writing from two and three year olds as well as sophisticated stories, drawings and sculptures from the older children. We then brought footage of the children taking part in The Cloth Place into sharp focus alongside their work, in a large white box. The message to adults visiting the exhibition was "Silence Please, Children Touching Talking Texting."

Everyone took part.





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