

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Youth theatre is my favourite day of the week.”

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1.1 Aim and Scope of Study

Youth Theatre Ireland promotes critical thinking and research in the area of youth theatre. It is committed to conducting research that investigates youth theatre practice and explores its impact on the artistic, social and personal development of the young person. Youth Theatre Ireland carries out surveys, evaluations and also key research projects such as the *Centre Stage* series to contribute to the national evidence base on youth theatre practice.

Centre Stage +20 aims to generate a detailed picture of current youth theatre activity in Ireland and to determine the key priorities for the future development of youth theatre.

Centre Stage +20 is the third national study of youth theatre undertaken by Youth Theatre Ireland. Centre Stage was carried out by Youth Theatre Ireland in 1997/1998 and Centre Stage +10 took place 10 years later in 2007-2009. While retaining a core of similar research fields and methodologies to allow for comparison, Centre Stage +20 has evolved to contain new questions relating to recent developments in structure, policies and practice as well as changes in the profile and participation of leaders and members. It is important that the research project continues to evolve and reflect new themes and methodologies.

The research process aims to examine the state of current Irish youth theatre under four general headings which are retained from Centre Stage +10 and examine changes which have taken place in the last 10 years:

- Youth theatre structures, funding and resources;
- Youth theatre practice and programming;
- Youth theatre members and leaders;
- Outcomes of participation in youth theatre.

Centre Stage +20 aims to draw recommendations from the research which will contribute to the development of the youth theatre sector.

1.2 Process and Methodology

The Centre Stage +20 research project was undertaken between November 2017 and September 2019.

Research Values

Youth Theatre Ireland identified the following research values to guide the project:

- Equality of participation for all young people involved in the research project;
- A young-person-centred approach;
- Honest and fair representation of the young person's voice in the research project and eventual publications and report.

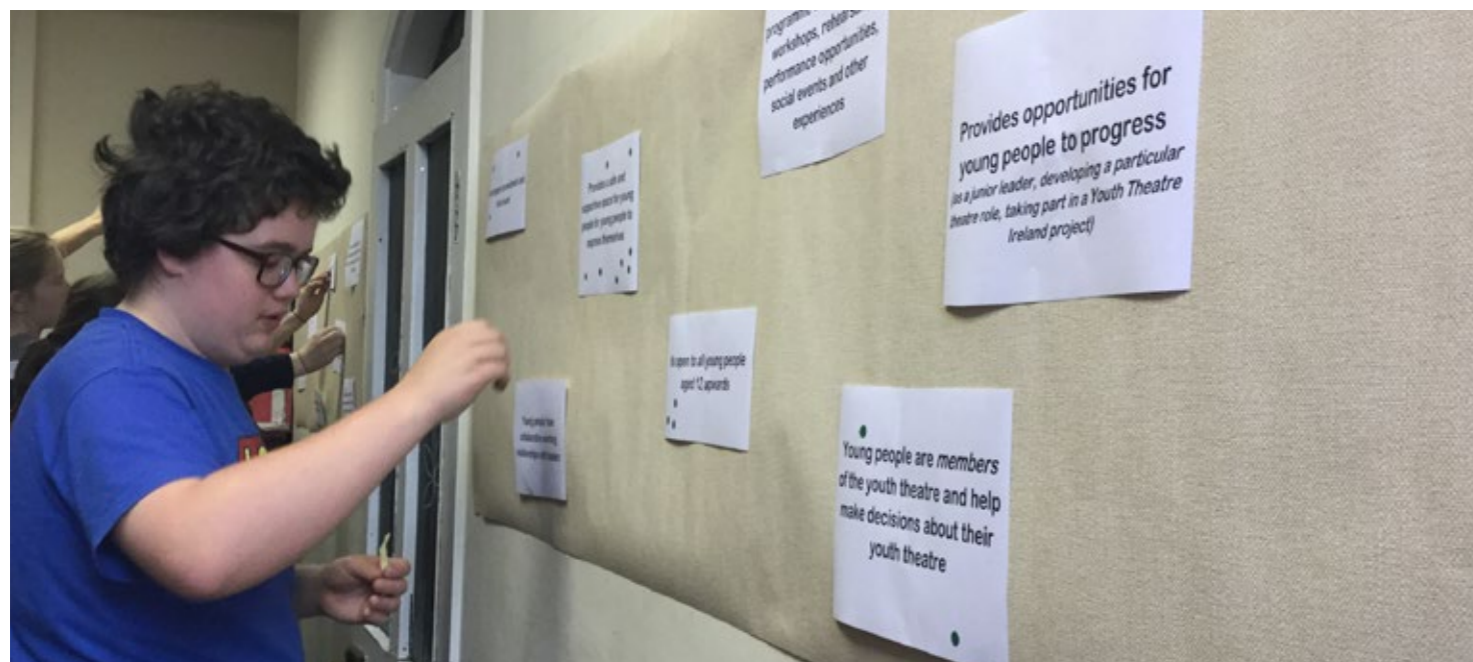
Youth Theatre Ireland used the following methodologies during the Centre Stage +20 research project:

Youth Theatre Census Week

A Youth Theatre Census Week took place from November 24th to 30th 2017, in which all youth theatres were asked to audit their activities. This involved logging the type and number of activities that took place and details regarding leaders, members and venues. Leaders were also asked to complete a questionnaire about their youth theatre's activities, relationships, participation levels and expenditure levels that week. The date of the Census Week was chosen to match the *Centre Stage* censuses of 1997 and 2007.

Research Workshops with Youth Theatre Members

Youth theatre members were consulted through workshops designed to stimulate discussion and debate concerning the key research areas. The workshop was designed by Youth Theatre Ireland staff in consultation with members of the Youth Board and provided opportunities to allow for group exploration of key issues through games, activities and group discussion. Member workshops focused on the 12 to 20 age group.



Centre Stage +20 Member Workshop. Photo: Rhona Dunnett.

Six member workshops took place around the country between July and November 2018. Locations included:

- The Youth Theatre Member's Forum at The National Festival of Youth Theatre (Kilkenny);
- Dublin (two workshops);
- Cork;
- Limerick;
- Longford.

Questionnaires for Youth Theatre Members and Leaders

A questionnaire for leaders and a questionnaire for members were disseminated to each youth theatre to gather information regarding the profile and experiences of youth theatre members and leaders. These questionnaires were completed between July and December 2018.

Youth Theatre Questionnaire

One key leader from each youth theatre was asked to complete a final questionnaire about how their group operates, its programming and finances. These questionnaires were completed between March and August 2019.

Desk-based Research

A review was undertaken of contemporary, related reports and studies to contextualise the research and its findings. Desk-based research also included a study of other relevant Youth Theatre Ireland surveys and evaluations, as well as a review of the youth theatre archive and membership data. This work took place throughout the research period and a bibliography is included in Appendix 1.

Case Studies

Case studies were developed with selected youth theatres to examine the key research areas in depth and provide a narrative for some of the important statistics arising from the research. Case studies were completed between July and September 2019.

A Sample of Written Statements From Youth Theatre Members

Youth theatre members were asked to describe youth theatre by completing postcards at the National Festival of Youth Theatres in 2018 which began "Youth Theatre is...".



Centre Stage +20 Member Workshop. Photo: Rhona Dunnett.

1.3 Centre Stage +20 Participants

Selection criteria were created for Centre Stage +20 participants and the following youth theatres were invited to participate:

- All Youth Theatre Ireland affiliated youth theatres as of November 2017.
- All un-affiliated youth theatres that were engaged in an active development process with Youth Theatre Ireland, were working with young people and were at an advanced stage in the affiliation process (so that their practice was comparable with other youth theatres).

'Affiliated' Status of Youth Theatres

Youth Theatre Ireland staff work with developing youth theatres to help them set up, develop quality youth theatre practice with young people, and comply with national regulations and legislation. To affiliate, developing youth theatres need to satisfy a set of affiliation criteria (as agreed by the Youth Theatre Ireland Board), which state that an affiliated youth theatre should:

- Have aims and objectives;
- Have an artistic vision;
- Demonstrate a commitment to aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people;
- Have a welfare/child protection policy;
- Be not-for-profit;
- Exist outside of formal education;
- Have a non-competitive policy;
- Have an inclusive ethos that encourages the participation of all young people;
- Have recruited a group of committed young people and have plans to recruit more;
- Have youth theatre members aged 12 and over;
- Have a group of interested adults to run the youth theatre;
- Have suitable space(s) and public liability insurance cover;
- Intend to/have already started to run an annual programme including regular drama workshops.

Participants

- 59 youth theatres were invited to participate in Centre Stage +20.
- Four of these affiliated youth theatres were inactive at the start of the research period while they reviewed activities. These youth theatres formally closed at an early stage of the research period and have not been included in the Centre Stage +20 research. These included: Boolabus Youth Theatre; Clondalkin Youth Theatre; Kilcullen Youth Theatre; and Offaly Youth Theatre.
- 55 youth theatres are counted as participants in Centre Stage +20. These include 51 affiliated youth theatres and four developing youth theatres that had achieved the selection criteria by November 2017.

Centre Stage + 20 has a higher level of participants than ever before and is more representative of the youth theatre sector as a whole than in previous iterations. Centre Stage included 33 participating youth theatres and Centre Stage +10 included 45 participating youth theatres. The number of Centre Stage +20 youth theatres marks a 68% increase since Centre Stage in 1998.



Centre Stage +20 Member Workshop. Photos: Rhona Dunnett.

Table 1.1 provides information about the participation levels for each research method.

Table 1.1: Participation Levels for Centre Stage +20

Centre Stage +20	
No. of youth theatres that participated in Centre Stage +20	55
No. of counties represented in Centre Stage +20	24
Census Week	
No. of youth theatres represented	44
No. of counties represented	23
Member Workshops	
No. of members who participated	103
No. of youth theatres represented	24
Member Questionnaires	
No. of questionnaires	614
No. of youth theatres represented	35
Leader Questionnaires	
No. of questionnaires	77
No. of youth theatres represented	32
Youth Theatre Questionnaires	
No. of questionnaires	32
No. of counties represented	18

Changes in Circumstances of Centre Stage +20 Youth Theatres

The youth theatre sector is always evolving and the circumstances of some youth theatres included in the Centre Stage +20 report have changed since youth theatres were invited to participate in November 2017.

- Dúisigh Youth Theatre and Courthouse Youth Theatre were both reviewing their activities during the research period and were inactive at times in terms of direct work with young people. Both groups have re-launched and are working directly with young people in 2019.
- Tallaght Youth Theatre closed during 2018.
- East Galway Youth Theatre closed at the start of 2019.
- Footsteps Youth Theatre closed at the start of 2019.
- Of the four developing youth theatres that were invited to participate in Centre Stage +20, Act Out Youth Theatre and Mostrim Youth Players affiliated in 2018 and Belturbet Youth Theatre and Ardclough Youth Theatre are still involved in the youth theatre development process.

Note on Other Active Youth Theatres Outside the Research Sample

A small number of other youth theatres were active during the Centre Stage +20 research period but were not included in the study as they did not meet the selection criteria in November 2017.

During the research period, new youth theatres were formed and have achieved affiliation to Youth Theatre Ireland, including:

- Making Waves Youth Theatre (Greystones, Wicklow);
- UCC Youth Theatre (Cork City);
- Giant Wolf Youth Theatre in residence at The Civic (Tallaght, Dublin).

During the research period, Youth Theatre Ireland also continued its developmental relationship with some youth theatres that had not achieved the selection criteria by November 2017, including:

- D15 Youth Theatre (Blanchardstown, Dublin);
- Galway Youth Theatre (Galway City);
- Mill Youth Theatre (Dundrum, Dublin);
- POD Youth Theatre (Virginia, Cavan).

1.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data

To assist with the readability of the report and the analysis of data, the following decisions have been made:

- Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number in graphs and within the main body of the text. Percentages within tables are rounded to one decimal point.
- In general, the adults who work in youth theatres are termed 'Youth Theatre Leaders' or 'leaders' throughout the report. The term 'leader' is assumed to encompass a wide variety of roles and titles adopted by the adults who work in youth theatre (See Section 6.2).
- Membership data from Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaires is compared with Census 2016 data for the 10 to 14 and 15 to 19 age groups (www.cso.ie). These age groups are the best match for the age range represented within the Member Questionnaires (See Figure 5.2 in Section 5.1.1).
- References within the text to other chapters are written in the form 'See Section 2.1.4'. The first number is always the chapter number and the second and third numbers are sub-divisions within that chapter as outlined in the table of contents.