



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Valuing Young Audiences: how children experience live theatre and dance, and why it matters

Fully-funded AHRC PhD studentship

Summary

Applications are invited from prospective candidates for an AHRC-funded PhD on the value for children of experiencing live theatre and dance as audience members. This is a new collaboration between the University of Aberdeen and [Imagine](#), Scotland's national organisation which promotes, develops and celebrates theatre and dance for children and young people.

The successful applicant will work with the supervisory team to prepare an application to the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities (SGSAH) in February 2019 as part of the SGSAH Collaborative Doctoral Award competition. If successful the studentship will commence on 1st October 2019.

The project will be supervised by Professor Amy Bryzgel (Visual Culture, University of Aberdeen) and Dr Jo Vergunst (Anthropology, University of Aberdeen) and Paul Fitzpatrick (Imagine).

The student stipend is approx. £15,500 per annum, with access to additional funding for travel and training.

Location

The student will be expected to conduct field research with Imagine in the Edinburgh area for at least 6 months in total across Years 1 and 2 of the PhD. There is possibility for a smaller-scale comparative study in Aberdeen or elsewhere depending on the student's interests. Academic supervision will take place in the University of Aberdeen and supervision with Imagine (the Industry Partner), in Edinburgh.

Project Details

This PhD explores how children's experiences of theatre and dance as audience members can be meaningfully understood.

Our starting point is the lack of robust evidence on the value that experiences of watching live theatre and dance can have for children. However, there is considerable anecdotal evidence within the sector that such experiences can be beneficial. Scottish youth arts policy currently values theatre and dance 'participation' – children's direct involvement in dance or drama workshops, classes and performances – in terms of confidence development, resilience and communication skills. By contrast, there is little research on the value of *watching* theatre and dance, despite the fact that this may constitute the majority of performing arts experiences for many children.

Key questions include:

- Can a 'one-off' experience of a visit to the theatre be transformative for a child?
- What is the value of repeated performance experiences and associated outreach activities?
- How do children, teachers and parents understand the value of these experiences?
- How can this value be communicated in terms which honour the artistic experience but can also be understood by funders and policy-makers?

This PhD will make a vital contribution to the children's theatre and dance sector, enabling it to better reflect on its own practice, to collaborate more usefully with the education sector, and to improve its advocacy by drawing on a stronger evidence base. The research also has potential to influence arts and cultural policy in Scotland and beyond.

Conceptually, the project will build on the AHRC's recent Cultural Value Project (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016). However, where valuing of the arts for children is usually regarded in terms of cognitive development, social skills or educational attainment, here we wish to start from children's, teachers' and parents' own experiences. We will for example build on work in anthropology and performance studies that has long recognised the distinctive roles of the audience in making a performance happen.

We offer the opportunity to work with an outstanding supervisory team on this high-impact project. Primary supervisor [Professor Amy Bryzgel](#) is a leading European authority on performance studies, and [Dr Jo Vergunst](#) brings expertise as a social anthropologist with extensive experience of ethnographic and qualitative research methodologies. With [Paul Fitzpatrick](#) of Imagine, the PhD student will be supported to engage with children, parents and teachers through three Imagine projects:

- **Inspiring Schools:** a new programme working in 6 disadvantaged schools across three years in partnership with Punchdrunk theatre company. Inspiring Schools will give pupils a range of high-quality theatre and dance production experiences both in and outside of school, developing the value of these experiences in the classroom through artist residencies.
- **[Theatre in Schools Scotland:](#)** a national touring programme which brings professional theatre and dance productions into schools.
- **[The Edinburgh International Children's Festival:](#)** Scotland's world-leading Festival of children's theatre and dance, with an annual audience of over 17,000 children, teachers and parents.

Eligibility

To be eligible to apply you must:

- Meet the residency criteria set out by [UKRI](#), including the stipulation that candidates must have been normally residing in the UK for 3 years prior to the start of the studentship.

The AHRC also expects that applicants to PhD programmes will normally hold, or be studying towards, a Masters qualification in a relevant discipline. If you are not in this position you may be able to use relevant professional experience to provide evidence of your ability to undertake independent research. If this is the case, please ensure you provide details of your professional experience in your covering letter.

Experience of research into the value of the arts, and/or some understanding of theatre and dance for children, will be of benefit to the project. However, this is not a prerequisite so

while preference may be given to candidates with prior experience in these areas, others are warmly encouraged to apply.

Application Process

Applicants should submit a single Word file, maximum length strictly four pages, with:

1. a curriculum vitae (1 page)
2. a letter explaining your interest in the studentship and outlining your qualifications for it (2 pages)
3. a brief cover note that includes your full contact details together with the names and contact details of two academic referees (1 page).

Applications should be emailed to Amy Bryzgel: a.bryzgel@abdn.ac.uk, no later than 5pm on 30th November 2018. Applicants will be notified if they are being invited to interview by Friday 7th December.

Interviews are scheduled to be held on Thursday 13th December, at Imagine's office in Edinburgh. We welcome Skype interviews for candidates unable to attend in person.

If you have any questions concerning the project, please contact the supervisors: Amy Bryzgel (a.bryzgel@abdn.ac.uk), Jo Vergunst (j.vergunst@abdn.ac.uk) or Paul Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive of Imagine (paul@imagine.org.uk).