

# APPENDIX 4

## Interviews with Y2Kids Directors

### Interview with Peter Mitchell

- Director of the Hexagon Theatre Complex and co-director of the Y2Kids Youth Theatre Company.

**16<sup>th</sup> of August 2006**

Petro: What was your involvement with the Y2Kids?

Peter: I was the co-director with Veronica Baxter. It was a joint project between the Hexagon Theatre and the Drama Studies department. Veronica and I would take turns depending on what project was happening; or if there was just one project, she could do one and a few months later I would take over. We had quite a few facilitators during that time, about six or seven over that period. We also brought in experts to do various things, workshops with people like Ellis Pierson and Beki. If there were people performing at the Hexagon Theatre, they used to either come and do a workshop with them, or we would go and see their shows and talk to them afterwards. So there was a lot of exposure to people they would not have exposure to normally.

Petro: Thank you. What is your take on the reasons for the problem of absenteeism?

Peter: The first one would be school involvement, either sports activities or cultural. I remember one student was on the debating team and was always going away for weekends. If a student was involved in sports, they would just have to go if there was a match fixture. Secondly, where parents did not believe that the activity was a priority, they would either not be bothered to bring them in the morning, or they would just take them away for a weekend or just say "You're not going". Peer pressure with their friends going to other places, or going to the movies, or where ever they wanted to go, they would drag them along.

Petro: Was this because it happened on a Saturday?

Peter: I think Saturday had a lot to do with it, but we couldn't find a time... any other time during the week where there wouldn't be other things that would come into play. We tried to suggest a Friday afternoon, but we couldn't get enough time because a lot of the kids lived far away and we would have to get them home before dark.

Petro: Now the project that I did – you were not involved in at all except that your son was in it, and being a teenager, I am not sure how much he let through.

Peter: Absolutely nothing.

(Both laugh)

Petro: I wanted to know if you have any lasting impression or memory of the process that I ran.

Peter: I vaguely remember the kind of process you were going through. Also I have a memory of the comments afterwards.

Petro: Can you be specific about any of it?

Peter: On the negative side, one or two of them said that they didn't understand what this had to do with drama, because there was a lot of personal agenda and emotional issues coming out of the group. They couldn't work out what was re-play and what was real. Then on the positive side, they found that they learnt to understand themselves and each other a lot better during the process. So those were the things that came out after the project, after you had finished with them.

Petro: Anything else you wanted to say, any other impression – anything at all?

Peter: My impressions just generally over the four years was that there was a group of them who grew incredibly, not just in terms of theatre and performance, but because one is dealing with kids of that age obviously you are going to see an enormous amount of growth anyway, but a lot of maturity happening and understanding in terms of cross cultural things. Understanding where each other came from, which I don't think probably would have happened otherwise. When you are forced into a group with different cultures, you have to learn to compromise and learn about where the other person is coming from and they did a lot of that. Some of them came out as excellent performers, others came out a very good facilitators and I think that is why the final group worked so well.

Petro: That last little group I worked with at the end?

Peter: Yes the last little group. Those were the ones that was part of the process the longest and the ones who had been there most consistently.

Petro: They were also the ones who could articulate their own growth?

Peter: Yes.

Petro: Excellent, thank you. Of course I wanted you to say that the project I conducted with them had a significant role to play in this growth, but ...

Peter: Oh, but it did, it did. Surprisingly it did. Just purely in terms of what they came back with afterwards.

Petro: Because what I was aiming at, was getting them to articulate values ...

Peter: Not only articulate, but evaluate...

Petro: Exactly

Peter: Because after they could actually critically evaluate and say "this is what I got from that". And after I got back to them, they did not need some kind of structured process, it would just come out as we were rehearsing or as they were working on another project and they would say "Remember in Petro's thing where we did such and such and such and such, you said... and you did...and we

thought about yadadadada...and now we are not going to let that happen again, so we are going to sort this out before we go on". So, yes, it worked.

Petro: See that is the kind of thing I get excited about.

Peter: Well, it certainly happened.

Petro: Thank you for that. Thanks very much.

Peter: Pleasure.

### **Interview with Veronica Baxter**

- Senior lecturer in Drama Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Instigator and co-director of the Y2Kids Youth Theatre Company.

**18<sup>th</sup> of August, 2006**

Petro: Please give me your name and your position.

Veronica: Okay, I am Veronica Baxter. I am senior lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Drama Studies Department, although we are not 'Drama Studies' or a 'Department' anymore. I was the instigator and co-director of the Youth Theatre Company Y2Kids.

Petro: What was your involvement in the specific project I was running with them?

Veronica: I was aware of your working with the group and I was aware that you were going to try out, work with them in relation to the Hero's Journey. I was in agreement with your sharing their Saturday morning times with another facilitator. So roughly speaking you would have an hour and a half to two hours each week and that you would be taking the group through a process that was going to explore their values through a kind of experiential learning mixed in with a kind of theatre practice and you were going to be looking at what shapes their values and how they feel about values in general and I think I seem to remember there was activities to do with role models and the media and popular imagery. But, yes, I don't remember much more than that. I thought it was a useful exploration, particularly because I do remember feeling very strongly that what shaped their understanding about their values was precarious to say the least. And that I thought it would be very valuable work. I was also quite conscious that it was not purely performance, creating work, and that it had an educational component to it . . . and I felt that it was an aspect that the company needed to go through.

Petro: Now, one of the problems that you had with this theatre company and one that I really battled with was their absence. They were on and off and coming or not coming and I never knew who I would be working with. So I battled to sustain the growth process. Can you give me your take on the reasons for their absence?

Veronica: I think that there were a number of reasons. And I experienced the same thing in working with them in *The Children's Crusade* on Saturday mornings in general. And that is why eventually I felt the Youth Theatre Company was just not worth continuing. There was an enormous difficulty with young kids that were traveling from far away who would not have the money and there was a lot going on in their lives. My experience of those kids in 2002 and 2003 was that hell of a lot of them from the townships were experiencing mass deaths in the family, they were losing crucial guardians and that means that absenteeism was increasing, to go to the funerals, for one thing; and a sense of dislocation and I think there was a lot of depression amongst those kids. And the way they acted that out was to not come, to not do, to not take part of what was going on. So that was the one aspect that was about money, poverty and loss. I remember counting up how many of those students were so seriously affected by AIDS death in their families at the time.

Petro: Was it some of the girls as well? Because I remember the 2002 group...

Veronica: Yes, yes, and I think that may have had an impact.

Petro: Do you think that they may have felt that what I was doing wasn't relevant

Veronica: I don't think so. I think that they were getting their performance opportunities in what Justin Southy was doing in the other half, and I think that certainly for a number of them that I spoke to, they were very engaged and very excited by the work because it challenged them to think. Perhaps I only spoke to the ones who may have been challenged and who would have found it exciting because they were naturally thinkers. I don't think that the absenteeism really changed when you worked with the group compared to before. So I don't think the absenteeism was a problem specifically to this project, with the potential of it not being a performance project. Absenteeism also had to do with a general lack of discipline in the group where anything that came their way on a Saturday morning that was more interesting to do in the moment, they would elect to do. I also think that by that stage a lot of the company members were actually telling their parents that they were going to the youth theatre company when actually they went off to the mall. So I don't think that absenteeism had to do with your work.

Petro: Well let me put it differently, if the work was more focused on addressing their very real needs, could the absenteeism ...

Veronica: ...have changed...

Petro: Could they have wanted to come? That's what I mean by 'irrelevant'. If it was geared more specifically to their experience

Veronica: I suppose that is a possibility, but I don't know if I can say one way or the other definitively. I mean I keep thinking with the first group I was talking about, the group who were experiencing loss, who had financial difficulty, there was the whole thing of subsidizing their transport and we were running out of money by that stage too. I think that a lot of those difficulties were about people not being able to address something as lofty as performance and drama or theatre because their needs were more basic.

Petro: So they did not have enough distance from their everyday struggle to engage with something as lofty, as you say...

Veronica: Well I suppose there might have been a group of people who were dissatisfied because they wanted to perform but they got that opportunity to perform in the other half of the engagement, so I don't know if I buy that. But the other thing is that the youth theatre were quite a lazy bunch of thinkers in general and they didn't particularly like being challenged on what they saw as being right and the right the way to go about thinking and doing and feeling. They didn't like being challenged much.

Petro: So there were two groups, there was the group that had the financial difficulties and the poverty and the issues at home, there was the group that would just...

Veronica: ...dive off

Petro: ...dive off, go for the most exciting opportunity on a Saturday, were there others?

Veronica: I think there was a real strong core group of thinking people who just loved it. You know that N4 was one of them and he was so excited at thinking through things in a new way. And yes, N4 was always given to more critical engagement than other people were, but I think there was group of them who were very excited about the project.

Petro: Then my next question would be: Apart from the memory of what I intended to do, do you have any impression of the effects that the project had? Have you any impressions of the outcomes?

Veronica: I can't say that I have any strong sense of the outcomes other than the brief encounters that I've had with people who were talking particularly about media generated images and having viewed those, if you like, role models more critically through your processes. And I know that certain aspects of their acting, the sort of gaming aspect of the work they really had a lot of fun. I can remember them swanning about in various costume items and just having a blast. But beyond that I must say I don't really have any sense of the outcomes.

Petro: You didn't work with them shortly after completion of the process.

Veronica: No, because in the beginning of 2004 I was in England. I wasn't actually here for the first 6 months of the work. And then when I came back to it in mid 2004 there was a certain degree of burial that had taken place.

Petro: Yes, of course. Thank you very much. Anything else you wanted to add?

Veronica: No I can't think off hand anything else.

Petro: Great, thanks.

Veronica: Sure thing.