

Institution: Middlesex University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA33		
Title of case study: The Newham Plays: enhancing cultural provision, developing young people's talent/skills, and benefiting local organisations through pro-localist, site-local, new writing.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2019		
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:
James Kenworth	Lecturer in Media Narrative	2017-present
James Martin Charlton	Head of Media Department	2003-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Created, produced and written by James Kenworth, and directed by James Martin Charlton, both long-term residents of Newham, the Newham Plays are a series of localist-focussed plays rooted in Newham's history, culture and people. Performed in site-sympathetic locations in Newham, East London, they feature a 'mixed economy' casting of young people and professional actors. The series has originated a <i>Pro-Localist</i> approach to cultural engagement, in which the plays are partnered and supported by a nexus of local funders, partners and stakeholders. Key impact from this work includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Impact on the young people of Newham: it has given about 250 young people from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to engage in the arts and culture; playing a role in addressing historically low levels of cultural engagement in the borough. Participation in the plays and associated activities has developed the skills of the young people involved, built confidence and boosted self-belief. 2. Impact on the community in Newham: benefiting local organisations, raising awareness of Newham's sites/ venues and the heritage of the borough, and enhancing cultural provision. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research contends that a localist and grassroots approach is the most effective way of empowering wider access to the arts, arguing for an increased emphasis on performance in local spaces rather than in prestige/ heritage theatres.</p> <p><i>When Chaplin Met Gandhi (2012)</i>¹, <i>Revolution Farm (2014)</i>, <i>A Splotch of Red: Keir Hardie in West Ham (2016)</i>, and <i>Alice in Canning Town (2019)</i> form the Newham plays developed through a collaboration between Kenworth (writer) and Charlton (director) and the community of Newham, East London. This collaborative theatre practice has developed a coherent body of research practice that manifests new ways in which it is possible to embed the life of a play in the town, place or community in which they are written, rehearsed, and performed. It takes as its source and inspiration the past and present culture history of Newham, exploring, investigating and celebrating the area's character through use of community space as performance auditoria and a mixed economy of professional and local talent.</p> <p>All three plays submitted here are partnered and supported by well-known, local, grassroots organizations and charities, which have substantial roots and ties in the community: The Royal Docks Trust, Community Links and Ambition, Aspire, Achieve. The two other significant partnerships/ stakeholders are the local primary and secondary schools in Beckton and Custom House, and Middlesex University's Media Department. The development and promotion of partnership/stakeholder building that has been invested in supports the infrastructure of the shows and enables the research to make an impact on its participants in</p>		

¹ The play falls outside of impact period, but was the first in the series of Newham Plays.

the ways listed in Section 4.

The plays have developed and maintained a successful and fruitful, long-term partnership with three schools within main funders The Royal Docks Trust's area of benefit (i.e. for those communities south of the Newham Way 'A13' - *Beckton, Canning Town, Custom House, North Woolwich, West Silvertown, Silvertown*), who support the plays and encourage their pupils to participate in acting roles in the shows: Gallions Primary School, Kingsford Community School, Royal Docks Academy. The schools' drama teachers have been essential in helping identify talented and enthusiastic pupils keen to gain professional drama experience. We organised visits to their drama classes to run workshops and auditions to gauge interest among pupils. Each show has been followed by a series of free drama workshops offered to the schools, using drama techniques like improvisation, games, and role play to explore the themes and issues of the plays. Fully resourced, documented and professionally printed Education Resource Packs feature pupils and staff from schools who took part in the drama workshops.

3. References to the research

- Kenworth, James. *Alice in Canning Town: an exclusively East-End reimagining of a fantasy classic*. Portsmouth: Playdead Press, 2019. 65 minute drama, directed by James Martin Charlton. *Public performance record*: Arc in the Park, Canning Town, August 2019
- Kenworth, James. *A Splotch of Red: Keir Hardie in West Ham*. Workers' Play Time Vol. One, edited by Doug Nicholls. Oxford: Workable Books, 2017. 65 minute drama, directed by James Martin Charlton. *Public performance record*: Community Links, Canning Town and Newham Libraries, 22nd - 28th August 2016
- Kenworth, James. *Revolution Farm*, 65 minute drama, directed by James Martin Charlton. *Public performance record*: Newham City Farm, Beckton 19th - 24th August 2014

The Newham plays have received significant, long-term, sustained support from East London charity Royal Docks Trust:

- Main Programme Funding 2018/19, Royal Docks Trust, £23,000 (*Alice in Canning Town* play)
- Minor Grants, 2019/20, Royal Docks Trust, £2,000 (*Alice in Canning Town* Education Resource Pack + Drama Workshops)
- Main Programme Funding 2016/17, Royal Docks Trust, £15,000 (*A Splotch of Red* play)
- Main Programme Funding, 2017/18, Royal Docks Trust, £5,000 (*A Splotch of Red* Education Resource Pack + Drama Workshops)
- Grants for the Arts, Arts Council England, 2014, £14,995 (*Revolution Farm* play)
- Main Programme Funding 2014/15, Royal Docks Trust, £15,000 (*Revolution Farm* play)
- Main Programme Funding, 2015/16, Royal Docks Trust, £5,000 (*Revolution Farm* Education Resource Pack + Drama Workshops)

4. Details of the impact

The London Borough of Newham (population 353,134) experiences significant economic and social challenges, with more than half of children (52%) are judged to be in households in poverty, compared to 38% in the typical London borough. It is euphemistically referred to as a 'cold spot' by arts organisations, an area where cultural engagement is significantly below the national average. The Newham plays and associated activities make a contribution to redressing historically low levels of cultural engagement/participation in the borough, involving approximately 250 young people from diverse backgrounds, e.g. Asian, Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

Impact on the young people of Newham. Cultural participation developing young people's skills and building confidence. A key motivation of developing and staging the plays is to increase access for young people to cultural and creative opportunities within the borough. Kenworth and Charlton have a near decade-long relationship with three local schools who have worked in partnership on the Newham plays. Approximately 30 pupils have worked

with professional actors to develop the plays during intensive 3-week periods during their summer holidays since 2014. There is a fluctuating cohort of local youngsters selected from auditions; some newcomers to each production, whilst a few have been in several of the plays, progressing from small to major roles. Following each of productions, the schools partner with Kenworth and Charlton on a series of free drama workshops delivered for approximately 200 pupils over a one week period (accompanied by resource packs – *Revolution Farm/A Splotch of Red*). The benefit to participating students is evident in comments from teaching staff which highlight the ‘engaging approach’, the use of the ‘compelling medium’ of theatre and drama ‘for education and exploration’, and the ‘far-reaching’ value of the experience for the young people involved; alongside the opportunities it gives for students to ‘engage in the artistry of the drama’ and ‘gain and develop new skills’ [1].

Working in partnership with Newham Council, who were keen to promote the play and celebrate the borough’s socialist heritage, *A Splotch of Red* (2016) was staged in libraries across of Newham. A special free offer for the library performances was made available to Newham residents, supported by Newham Council. Deborah Peck, Library Development Officer, Resident Engagement and Participation notes the ‘teamwork’ in bringing together ‘this ensemble piece in which each young person’s contribution creates “the whole” and the benefits for participants of ‘working alongside professional actors, in a play written by a local author, locally funded and produced’ in terms of understanding that ‘the arts is a viable career path.’ She also highlights the importance of the young actors being ‘from diverse backgrounds, portraying a representation of the borough’s demographic. In a society in which representation and diversity is currently being addressed this production trail blazes but without a hint of tokenism’ [2].

The Newham Plays secured sustained competitive awarded financial support from The Royal Docks Trust (RDT, London) being awarded £65,000 since 2014. RDT Trustee and Grants and Community Development Officer, John Johnson highlights how the beneficial relationships formed between the Trust, Middlesex University, and the community of Newham has ‘developed a valuable model for schools and young people to be directly involved in creating and participating in creative drama [...] developing and expanding the experience and confidence of those who have taken part’ [3]. Steve Nicholls, Founding Trustee Director of The Royal Docks Trust, writes of the role of the plays in ‘enhancing opportunities and mindset about what could be possible for young people raised in one of the most multiply deprived boroughs in the country [...] The projects were not games in which to have a bit of fun for the summer, they were serious productions and the young people rose to the challenge’ [3].

Revolution Farm and *A Splotch of Red* were developed in collaboration with principle Newham Play stakeholders/partners Community Links (a social action charity, rooted in East London), and *Alice in Canning Town* partnered with Ambition, Aspire, Achieve (AAA), a charity that works to provide opportunities for the children and young people of Newham. Co-founder of Community Links and Founder of AAA, Kevin Jenkins OBE notes that for the children and young people involved, the plays provide ‘a unique opportunity to build personal confidence, develop core life skills and grow natural talent and abilities – enhancing their future attainment and achievements personally, socially and educationally.’ He continues to reinforce the importance of demonstrating to ‘children and young people, especially those not previously involved in the arts, that the arts are accessible to them, they can participate in and enjoy such activities, they have much to give to such activities and they can grow as an individual as a result’ [4]. This sense of possibility and creative potential realized was reinforced by the widespread media coverage attracted by the productions including: *Revolution Farm* being ‘Highly recommended’ and described as ‘a terrifically powerful update’ in *The Independent* (22nd August 2014), as well as being one of *Time Out’s* Top Ten Shows to see in August (30th July 2014), and *A Splotch of Red* receiving a 4* review in *The Morning Star* (28th August 2016) which highlighted the contribution of the young cast members. Coverage in the *Newham Recorder of Revolution Farm* further drew attention to the role of the young actors, ‘School children shine in re-imagining of Orwell classic’ (28th August 2014) and features a profile of one of the pupils from Gallion’s Primary School and his ambitions to become an actor. A

Splotch of Red, by the *Newham Recorder*: ‘Young Newham actors enjoy rare experience in Keir Hardie play’ (27th August 2016), noted the benefits to young participants. It reported that for ‘Demy Joseph, 20, the play [...] is his first experience of acting. “This is helping me improve my life,” Demy, who lives in Victoria Street in Stratford, said. “I’m not working now because my daughter Inayah was born 12 days ago – but I would like to write.” [...] “It’s an experience that not many people get,” Abubacarr Bah, 13, who plays three roles in the show, said’ [5].

A further indication of the benefits for the young people involved is provided by feedback given after participation in the performances and workshops. Analysis of Pupil Evaluation Forms revealed that more than half of the pupils felt that their self-confidence had improved as a result of the activities done in the *Splotch of Red* workshops, while 98% of them answered positively about the workshops being an enjoyable experience with only 2% being unsure. Nearly 60% of the pupils in the *Revolution Farm* workshops felt that they had learnt new skills with 40% of them asserting this strongly. Overall summaries of Pupil Evaluation Forms demonstrated that the most consistent benefits and skillset development for young participants included: working with others (collaboration/team building); boosting self-belief/confidence levels; being taken out of their comfort zone (challenges of promenade/site-specific theatre); learning about specialised performance skills (breathing, projection, vocal exercises); making new friends/meeting people [6].

Impact on the community in Newham: Benefiting local organisations, raising awareness of Newham’s sites/venues and the heritage of the borough, and enhancing cultural provision. An indication of the significance of the Newham Plays to the local community is successful, long-term partnerships enjoyed with local organisations (Community Links, Ambition, Aspire, Achieve, Royal Docks Trust, Newham Council), Steve Nicholls of The Royal Docks Trust, highlights the importance of the Newham plays in ‘enhancing and promoting a sense of worth and achievement and significance’ for the area, and demonstrating that there ‘could be genuine pride in being a child of a region’. He continues to note the lack of cultural facilities in the area and details how the ‘plays and associated videos, study guides, and panel discussions represent a small but, for some, a significant levelling of the playing field - or at least, a glimpse of a different playing field even existing’ [3]. This increased access to the arts and cultural opportunities is reflected in Newham Council providing financial subsidy for *A Splotch of Red* to enable a special free offer to Newham residents, and *Alice in Canning Town* being a ‘pay-what-you-can’ production with proceeds raised going to Ambition Aspire Achieve. Deborah Peck of Newham Libraries also notes this enhanced cultural provision commenting how ‘many residents are still not able to access good quality theatre. The libraries are much more accessible [...] therefore bringing quality theatre into these spaces allows residents to access this medium and to whet their appetite for further cultural experiences. The performances of *A Splotch of Red* at Newham Libraries attracted an audiences of over 150 which were ‘very good’ for a library environment and a ‘testament to the quality of the performance and interest for local people’ [2].

The staging of the plays in specific locations throughout the borough; *Revolution Farm* at one of London’s longest established and largest inner city farms, Newham City Farm; *A Splotch of Red* at Newham’s libraries and Community Links’ Neighbours Hall in Canning Town; and *Alice in Canning Town* in The Terence Brown Arc in the Park, an adventure play, sports and youth hub run by the AAA; has ‘reimagined’ the use of local sites for cultural programmes and raised awareness of venues and organisations involved. Kevin Jenkins (Community Links/AAA) in crediting the ‘sustained impact’ of the plays, writes that the staging of the dramas not only had benefits for the young people involved, but ‘brought ongoing positive benefits for the host organisation’ as it enabled them ‘to promote both the organisation and the particular site concerned in both its immediate catchment area and wider afield’ and ‘increase awareness of the organisations work’. This allowed them not only to strengthen existing relationship with funders, partners and stakeholders but also ‘to reach and engage new funders, volunteers and supporters’. Trustees of AAA watching *Alice* fully supported the charity’s involvement in the show: ‘An unusual activity for AAA to support but clearly well worth it. Do feel free to pass on my positive comments to the team that put on the play. So original, creative and a great

opportunity for the young people to gain valuable experience'. [5]. Media coverage of the plays also took the area and its venues and organisations to a wider audience. Examples of this are given by The British Theatre Guide's coverage of *Revolution Farm* which said: 'If like me you have always meant to visit Newham City Farm then Revolution Farm [...] presents the perfect introduction'; and Broadway World's coverage of *Alice in Canning Town* highlighting its staging in the 'vibrant' Arc in the Park 'an inclusive adventure playground in Canning Town [...] featuring tree houses, swings, trampolines, rope bridges, giant slides, teepees' [5]. Audience feedback praised and celebrated the plays' local flavour, one in particular remarking how much her friend enjoyed *Alice's* East-End makeover; '[...] because she's born and bred Eastender, she was particularly impressed with the local dimension of the play, the East End characters from her childhood, and the multicultural aspect of the play'. [5]

Reflecting on the subject matter of the plays Steve Nicholls of the Royal Dock Trust notes that they have a role in 'genuinely enhancing and promoting a sense of worth and achievement and significance for the region' [3]. *A Splotch of Red* dramatized and contemporized Keir Hardie's historic election victory in West Ham, raising awareness of Newham's rich social heritage, and its contemporary relevance for the region. Rokhsana Fiaz OBE, Councillor for Custom House Ward, Newham, (elected Mayor of Newham in 2018), attended a performance of *A Splotch of Red* at Community Links in Canning Town, a venue used by Hardie himself for meetings. In writing to congratulate the team behind the production she wrote how this staging had made the experience 'all the more potent', highlighted the enduring relevance of the issues that Hardie campaigned on, and expressed her hope that involvement would inspire the young cast's 'ambitions as well as civic engagement' [7].

Further support for the importance and relevance of this heritage to local residents is given by the MP for West Ham, the Rt Hon Stephen Timms writing the introduction to the educational resource pack produced to accompany *A Splotch of Red* workshops, where he draws attention to the modern day relevance of many of Hardie's causes, adding that he hopes that the resource pack 'will play an important part in keeping alive the memory of Keir Hardie and this fascinating period of Newham's history'. [8] Schools and pupils participating in the workshops have recognized and applauded the value of celebrating Newham's past in the plays too. Kingsford Community School's Head of Drama enthused, 'Exploring the political history of their local area and the work of Keir Hardie, proved to be both fascinating and eye opening for students.' [1] In an interview with local newspaper Newham Recorder, one of the young local actors in the play talked about how much he had learnt from the play's subject matter, "We should be proud of Keir Hardie. If he didn't surface, who knows where we would be? Work would still be painstaking". [5].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Teacher Testimonials on impact/benefits of free drama workshops on young people (see 1.a. *Revolution Farm* (p4) and 1.b. *Splotch of Red* (p7) Education Resource Packs).
2. Library Development Officer, Newham Libraries Evaluation on *A Splotch of Red* library performances
3. Royal Docks Trust, Grants Summary 2011-20 statement of funding for Newham Plays and RDT Trustee Steve Nicholls Testimonial on the impact of the plays on young people.
4. Statement from Founder Ambition, Aspire, Achieve (AAA) and Co-founder Community Links.
5. Collated press/publicity: *Revolution Farm*, *A Splotch of Red*, and *Alice in Canning Town*.
6. Pupil Evaluation Forms Summaries showing quantitative data on impact/benefits on young people's participation in workshops and plays.
7. Cllr for Custom House Ward, letter of congratulations to cast/creative team of *A Splotch of Red*.
8. Introduction to *A Splotch of Red* Resource Pack by Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP for West Ham (see source 1.b.p3).