

Feedback Report
Kathmandu workshops
5th - 9th March 2019
BOP hosted by British Council Nepal

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In early March 2019 Birds of Paradise Theatre Company delivered 5 half day workshops exploring access and inclusion within theatre to a diverse group of participants ranging from disabled people and those with a new interest in theatre to non-disabled staff from Kathmandu theatres. The workshops focused on disability equality, BOP’s use of creative access and collaborative working while developing ideas for a British Council grant which was due to open for applications at the end of the workshops.



What were the aims of the workshops?

The aim of the workshops was that the participants left with:

- A better understanding of disability, access and inclusion in the arts in the UK
- Practical methods of being inclusive for audience members and in creative practice
- An action plan of what they will do next in their day to day work
- New connection and networks

BOP had no previous relationship with the participants so it was also BOP’s aim to grow our own networks and knowledge in Nepal.

What happened:

Mairi Taylor (Executive Producer), Michelle Rolfe (Producer) and Callum Madge (Engagement Manager) from Birds of Paradise Theatre Company were engaged to provide five, half-day workshop.

British Council Nepal were the hosts for the workshop. BOP had anticipated and planned for 15 – 20 participants, however in total we had 29 participants. Roughly 40% of participants had a disability. BOP worked responsively with the group, shifting activity in response to the group's size and learning needs. To do this we drew on our knowledge and on the established processes of the company - including artistic practises and knowledge around disability equality and artist development.

Day 1	Activity - • Welcome and introductions, BOP, translators and participants. • Sign name activity. Finishing with all participants having a sign name that they can audio described. • Introduction to BOPs work and how it has developed over 25 years. In 25 years it has ○ Gone from "For disabled people" to disabled lead ○ Theatre - Creative Access / Representation / Disabled peoples stories on stage / Wraparound activity. ○ Development - BOP Artists / BOP Young Artists. ○ Sector - Training / Access Scottish Theatre • What are the expectations of the room for the week. The desired learning outcomes - see below page 4.
Day 2	Activity - • We looked at who is disabled and different definitions in UK & Nepal legislation. • Models of disability & how BOP use them. • Discussed the key phrases and language used around disability • Activity looking at barriers and access requirements. ○ In groups, they started to look at their own access requirements and then feedback to the group. • Discussed how we remove barriers in BOPs work. ○ How we make a show accessible ○ How we make working on a show accessible ○ How we make development opportunities accessible
Day 3	Activity - • Inclusive warm up lead by Callum from BOP • Collaboration discussion and activity - ○ Discussed how BOP collaborate and the difference between involvement vs consultation ○ As a group, we decided on rules for our collaborations. See appended information. • Labels Stick Language activity with Sagar & Michelle - Discussing the language used to describe disability in Nepal.

	○ Group input on words ○ Sagar provided context around phrase used in Nepal that are considered (or not) politically correct. ● Introduction to the British Council fund and a discussion of the best use of next two days. BOP proposed focusing on devising and refining project ideas and the room agreed with this approach.
Day 4	Activity - ● Inclusive warm up ran by one of the participants. ● Open space activity to find ideas to collaborate on. ● Group split for - ○ “I love you but I just can’t smile” sign language activity - Looking at how we incorporate sign language and audio description within a short scene that uses this phrase. ○ Watching more of BOPs work ● Continue open space activity. Finished the day with 5 projects being discussed.
Day 5	Activity - ● Open space activity - ○ Refocus the group on the ideas ○ Feedback to the room - What is the idea? ○ Groups worked on questions that will help them to answer the questions on the British Council application form. See appended information. ● Present the Sign Language activity exercise to the full group ● Group evaluation /feedback of the workshops



Labels Stick Language activity - Day 3

Language Barriers

There was a minimum of 3 languages at any one time in the room, English, Nepali and Nepali sign language. This meant it took additional time to communicate with the full group. We had 2 sign language interpreters which was sufficient for the 3 Deaf participants and allowed them to take required breaks. We had 1 English to Nepali interpreter, Hemanta, who did an excellent job and Sagar was able to help as well. It would have been ideal to have a 2nd interpreter as there was a lot of talking involved and this worked Hemanta very hard, with no breaks.

On occasion the participants would give a long and detailed speech regarding a matter/response to a question but Hemanta would only be able to give us the gist of the response, as it was too long and told with no breaks for interpretation time. There was difficulty in accessing a Nepali keyboard which meant printed information, including the grant information, was only in English. Not all the participants spoke or read English.

What were the outcomes?

At the end of the first day we set some learning outcomes about what people would like to get out of the workshop. This was important for BOP to understand what stage people were at and what they would like to learn.

1. Disabled facilities - how when and where can we learn - what do we need as disabled people to develop as artists? How do we make learning experiences accessible?
2. How do we maintain relationships with disabled people to make the whole experience more accessible - if disabled people come and have a bad experience or find not accessible how do we not lose them.
3. How do we build an audience for disabled artists?
4. We are all very diverse in our interests, how do we cooperate together beyond an interest in theatre?
5. If a disabled character is to be played by disabled actors how do we move towards this?
6. How do we provide access to art and all it communicates to a blind person?
7. How can stories be written that include disabled characters - and who decides?
8. How can disabled people feel comfortable and have a sense of belonging at the theatre?
9. How can we create a culture that does not only portray disability as weakness. How can we create an environment that focuses on strength? Change the dynamics
10. How do we make it that disabled people are comfortable as audience or as artist?

At the end of the final day, we talked through each of these learning outcomes and integrated what the participants had learnt throughout the 5 days and how learning in the workshops addressed each point.

Below is a direct transcript of the feedback provided on the final day by the participants - spoken by the Nepali-English translator Hemanta.

“Although this is the conclusion of this workshop but this conclusion should not mean it is the end. It should be the beginning. We have built relationships around here, we have the contact information of all the people

around here and we have made groups here. We have worked as groups here but he feels that all the meaning will be lost if tomorrow the groups will disband automatically and tomorrow morning they will not know where to meet, when to meet or have any plans to go forward. So he feels that the groups should take time and sit together and build a plan so this can be more long lasting and this can mean something.....So we still need to work with British Council.”

Mairi refocuses the group to feedback directly about the workshops

“He learnt how to say I love you in sign language... So the main thing that he learnt from the workshop is, before the workshop there was an unseen barrier created because it had been a social barrier and he did not know how to approach a person with a disability, how to communicate with them, how to say things and now **after this workshop he feels more confident. He is more confident on how he can deal with disability.**”

“He uses an example of Sagar, he says that although he has known Sagar for a while but this programme has given him the opportunity to actually have a conversation and develop a friendship with him, which he can take forward. Here in this room he has developed friendships, although they come different community and we have people who come from a very diverse communities but he has developed some genuine friendships.”

“In future productions that he will do now he has learnt that before he used to approach his productions as the audience who will come will be just like him. So now he knows that the prospective audience might be people with disability. So now he can separate space for them and create a space for them in future productions.”

“He really liked the experience of leading the warm up in the morning.”

“He has come here representing an organisation of popular theatre in Kathmandu, Mandela theatre, Kathmandu. The space has been used to perform plays that used / were related to disability and they used the wrong words, inappropriate words and there were debates about them and as a person who represents that organisation he did not know how to approach those kind of debates then. He came to this workshop expecting that he will get some clarification and it will be clear how to deal with these situations, which he has learnt. And now as the representative, he would put his input from what he gets from here. What he got from here he can take to his organisation and talk about it with his friends.”

“Before this workshop he used to meet any person with a disability he was always in a fix, in a dilemma, he didn’t know. One part of him said just go and help that guy and but also the thought maybe they do not need help and that we are just assuming something. The other part said if I don’t help is bad on a humanitarian ground so he was always in a dilemma. Should I help, should I not? But after this workshop he now knows that the big idea is friendship, just be friends with that person and there is no dilemma at all.”

“He got a new idea about he can incorporate all this things that we have learnt to make a new kind of play so that was a new idea for him.”

*“So since her childhood, she has always been interested in the fields related to art but people with disability are never introduced to things that promote their interest in arts from the early time. So their focus is very different and they don’t find support when they want from something that is related to art. The crux of what she said, from this workshop, what she feels although she had the inhibition and was shy to play her role in, to talk and communicate. **After this workshop she feels that something is a little more clear and she will not feel shy from her onwards to talk about things. She will not feel shy to perform.** She expects that more workshops will happen in the future that will focus on artists with disabilities.”*

*“Before he came to this workshop he had no idea about the theatre so **he has gained so idea and experience about theatre.** He is very thankful for that. He also adds that **he didn’t have any idea that his friends were (who) visually impaired or had hearing disability can also really enjoy theatre.** He didn’t have any idea about it, it’s completely a new thing and he really wants to thank Birds of Paradise for it.”*

*“Her expectations were completely different about this workshop when she came to this workshop she expected that when people from theatre and disability are coming together for a workshop she expected that we were going to create a story here, and develop it into some meaning full piece. That was her expectation but **she came into this workshop and saw, her expectations were not completely realised but she still feels that it was something new for her and very different for her.**”*

“A couple of years back he actually scolded her (short lady), he thought that she always played a character for comic relief. He was angry about it. He feels people with disabilities were used at plot devices and were only given small minor characters.”

*“The most important thing in this workshop it’s about Nothing About Us Without Us. Any films or theatre productions that happen will **no longer use persons with a disability just as a plot device but they will try and make it more inclusive and make something meaningful. You (people with disabilities) will no longer be used as props.**”*

*“He represents an organisation and his organisation provides a platform for opportunities for people with different kinds of disabilities. So **he feels this workshop will help him reach out more and communicate about this platforms and reach out to people with different kinds of disabilities.**”*

What did BOP learn?

- BOP has discovered that pre-workshop briefings to provide more context to who will be in the workshops & their experience. This is essential to setting context of the local setting and allows us to address any expectation in the room.
- We need to be mindful of language barriers within an international setting. Having two interpreters would have been beneficial to allow for breaks, group working and to check correct translations. It takes additional time to communicate with dealing with multiple languages. We are however very aware how limited resources impact on this.
- Reinforced the power of building workshops and training around our productions - this increases learning through examples and bolsters our explanation of methodologies.
- The importance of communicating the need for suitable spaces to deliver the workshops, including size, access, facilities for BOP and all involved - which can of course be very tricky depending on the ground resources.

- The impact of professional development opportunities for the full BOP team - this was Michelle and Callum's first time delivering this kind of work with Mairi and so it proved a development opportunity for the team.
- The ongoing need to educate disabled and non-disabled people about the core principles of disability equality and to support disabled people to recognise and communicate their access requirements.

Conclusion

In conclusion, BOP had a very rewarding time working with the participants and organisations in Kathmandu. We greatly enjoy meeting and working with people on the ground and we were particularly pleased that our work and approaches were well received - in particular that the disabled people in the room saw their own experiences reflected in how we talked about people viewing disability in the UK. While we work in very different contexts it is fascinating how themes around disability equality have certain universal truths and that the approach to increasing equality remain very similar - barrier removal, greater knowledge and understanding, relationship building, best practice examples, leadership and role models.