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Handout 1: Thinking skills

When you are looking to create an **issue based performance** (a performance that explores a question or problem relevant to an audience) it is important to explore the issue initially for research possibilities. You will need to explore if there is enough information available and also in order to identify a **target audience** (the specific group of people the objective of your work is aimed at). It is crucial that you can look at the issue from an audience's point of view and not just from the standpoint of a performer. You will want to use your own ideas and opinions; you will need to consider the viewpoints of others too. When working on an issue based performance it is helpful to make links between what you are trying to communicate to your audience, and appropriate performance techniques.

When you are selecting initial ideas and themes to research, it can be useful to **pitch** (prepare and present a convincing argument for the selection of your ideas) ideas to each other, either as individuals or in small groups. You can then focus on the strengths and weaknesses of each person's ideas and suggestions; this may lead to an obvious direction for the group, or it may provide leads that can be developed and the selection process can be repeated. An idea that results from combining more than one suggestion can be beneficial.

Individuals should be open and honest when looking at their strengths and weaknesses, and the group as a whole may want to audit the main skills within the group and check this is an appropriate skills base for the intended performance work. If you or members of your group need to learn new skills, or develop current skills, you will need to build the time to do this into your planning. Check you have the resources to do this as you may need guidance on techniques for improvement.

A useful exercise may be to improvise each of the initial ideas using a range of performance styles in order to fully understand the effect a particular style can have on the communication of an issue. After each exploration you should review the experience in terms of the skills needed and the effectiveness of communicating an issue to an audience. In order to fully consider the audience in terms of what they will take from your performance you should convey a well researched and fully developed performance rather than simply provide an entertainment.

Make sure you look at all the things that will need to be done and to allocate roles with a fair and achievable workload. It is important you have clearly defined individual roles and responsibilities in order to fulfil the requirements of the extended project.

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Handout 2: Organisation

It is important that you give enough time and consideration to the choice of topic, theme or the issue that you will base your extended project on. It may be helpful to decide at the outset if you are open as a group to creating a performance from a range of performance styles, or if you know at the beginning the kind of performance outcome you want to use to communicate your issue or theme. You will need to explore ideas and themes in order to make sure you select an area of work that not only holds interest for the group, but also one that will give you the opportunities for research, planning and review activities. This will also provide adequate opportunities for the creative development of the performance.

In order to agree a topic, theme or issue that is focused, it may be helpful if each member of the group, either individually or in pairs, presents an option to the rest of the group and then you can look at the strengths and weaknesses of the ideas, and decide as a group which area to develop.

To go from a general topic to a focused research question is the next crucial stage of your initial planning. As a group it may be valuable to make a **mind map** (a diagram showing your collected ideas) of all the options and again go through a selection process. It can be tempting to make an early decision, in order to get started with the creative development, but time spent at the start of your project fully exploring the options should lead you to having a fully developed idea that will provide you with clear and focused objectives and activities; it is important the whole group has a shared understanding of the overall creative goal. Although you will be working on your individual role, you need to understand how this fits into the bigger picture.

When you have your focused research question or title agreed it is important to focus on who your target audience will be. To create a performance with a clear idea of who it is for will keep your performance on track. It is also important to consider the effect you want your performance to have on the audience; are you setting out to challenge their current thinking, or to raise their awareness around a particular issue? You will need to think of ways you can measure the effect of your work against these goals; you may want a questionnaire for the audience, or a post performance discussion to facilitate this. You can then measure the effect against the initial creative idea.

The performance techniques you choose to work with should be linked to the style of piece you are trying to create. It may be more helpful to your group if you want to create a didactic (educational) piece of performance that delivers a clear message to use Brechtian techniques for example, rather than to create a piece of naturalism. The content and the style should be discussed alongside each other. If you have a focused and detailed plan, it will be useful to go back to this regularly to facilitate focused review of your work.

You need to consider the connections between the initial aims, the process of developing the performance and the final outcome and then the effect on the audience. Like the planning, it is helpful to break down the review and evaluation points against your goals and targets. It can be helpful to use the areas of performance, production and administration to start to do this.

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1 Beautiful smile

Case study 1: Beautiful smile

Beautiful Smile was a group performance project that went through several key stages and each stage could have led the group in an alternative direction for their work. The one described below was their preferred option.

The initial reason for the project was to look at how the performing arts can engage young people. One of the first focuses of research activity was to look for instances where young people engaging with the arts lead to an improvement in behaviour. The 'local community strategy', provided by the local district council, was the stimulus document. With the help of the teacher, the group identified areas of interest. They chose to look at how the local community had a fear of crime, which was believed to be out of perspective with incidents of actual crime. Further research showed that the older generation had the greatest fear of crime. Interviews with local police community support officers and local sheltered housing residents gave the group the idea of recording conversations between the generations that could be used for the development of dialogue for a performance.

Discussing a community project

At this stage the group were undecided as to where and when the performance would happen, but they were keen to bring the generations together, as this seemed to be a key factor in addressing the fear of crime. They decided to set a date and to plan to perform the piece in a local community hall. They had the agreement of the local sheltered housing that a bus would bring the older residents, and a youth group would be brought by the youth service.

To focus the conversations on a positive relationship between generations, the group decided to swap skills with the older residents; they taught texting and computer skills in return for lessons in knitting and card games. The sessions were recorded and the group used the recordings to create a scene structure and a storyline for a devised piece of drama.

The group had an established skills base for devising issue based drama and decided to keep to a style they had experience of, as the demands of generating the piece did not allow time for new skills to be learnt. They felt their chosen style would deliver a clear message and engage their audience. The scenes were structured so all performers were on the stage the whole time, and each performer played a range of roles. The set was merely an empty space with two blocks and the performers wore black. All the props were in a suitcase, which one actor brought onto the stage at the start, and then they were used and cleared away as each scene required. Two members of the group were musicians rather than actors. They were set on stage and involved in the action. The group were keen to perform without the **fourth wall** (an imaginary wall between the actors and the audience). The stage was simply space on the flat floor of the hall, with the audience seated on three sides.

The dialogue from the skills swap sessions was used to generate all the content for the piece. The musicians composed an original soundtrack for the scene changes and non verbal action, and played this live at the performance. They also recorded the music to CD for future performances. The actors generated a script for the piece, so it could be used by other youth groups.

Individuals presented their work to another group of performing arts students, as a case study for how issue based performance drama can be created.

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> **Project springboard**
> A community issue could provide a starting point for your project. Make contact with local organisations and explore ideas with them.
> Think how you might use audio or video recordings as a starting point for your project.

> **Activity 1: Choices and decisions**
> In a group, discuss some initial ideas for your own performance project.

What can you do?

To select an appropriate working title and subsequent research question you will, like *Beautiful Smile,* need to focus ideas and agree a group rationale. You need to gain an understanding of the creative needs of the event. You will then need to agree a set of objectives and these objectives will help you to think of the activities that need to happen to complete your project.

You also need to consider appropriate individual roles and responsibilities to bring all the work you do together. It is very important that within your group there is a shared understanding of how the various roles need to communicate and where the roles overlap. Also, consider how you are going to keep a clear record of your input to the group work.

In order to agree a shared rationale for your group project it is crucial that you have a shared understanding of the desired creative outcome. You need to explore all the groups' ideas in the initial planning stage, to know why you want to undertake a particular project, and why you have made the decisions you have. This phase of the work should not be rushed, as the choices made will inform the planning, research, realisation and review stages of your work.

It will be useful to take an initial **skills audit** (a record of the skills you have) of the group; looking at the skills individuals will bring, and at the skills you share as a whole group. This may inform your decisions concerning style of performance and appropriate individual roles and responsibilities. You should also consider at this initial planning stage how to further develop your performance skills. You may wish to broaden your skills by looking at a new style of performance, if this is the case, you should ask for guidance as to whether this is appropriate for the time and other resources you have available. Some skills and techniques will be achievable in a short space of time, whilst others will need to be developed over a longer period of time. You may want to look at a style of performance you have already explored, looking into the area of work in more depth. You may also want to consider looking at a style or **genre** (a particular type or style of work) from a new perspective or standpoint.

> **Activity 2: Skills audit**
> First list the skills that you think you can bring to a performance project, and list any areas where you think your skills are weak. Then work with the rest of your group and collate this information into a group mind map, diagram or list. You should include all skills relating to the planning, performing and reviewing aspects of your project.

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2. Telling a story: storyboards

A key stage of developing the performance *Beautiful Smile* was the selecting and transposing of recorded conversations into scenes for performance.

Activity 3: Create a storyboard
Take an existing story that your group all knows well. Select the key points in the story. Develop a storyboard as a group. Improvise from this storyboard to check the piece can be clearly communicated to an audience.

Keeping a record
Recording practical work in a logbook, or similar, is a useful way of keeping a record of the developmental process. You will need to do this for your project.

Activity 4: Keep a record
As a group discuss how you can record your individual and group contributions to the storyboard activity (Activity 3). From this discussion identify some practical ways in which to record your work in progress.

3. Practicalities

Resources
In planning your project, focus on the resources available to your group, in order to give your group a sense of what can be achieved. It is fine to have ambitious ideas and creative vision, but you will need to check these ideas against any practical constraints. The areas of performance, production and administration should be considered when looking at resources. Types of resources include the following;

Technical
Think of any equipment you may need for example, radio microphones, projector and screen, video footage, music playback. Think also of the technical skills you may need; operating certain equipment or using particular software.

Physical
You will need to prepare a rehearsal schedule and key considerations may include rehearsal space, studio time and set up time in your venue.

Time
Will you need to have whole group and small group rehearsals, technical and dress rehearsals, production meetings? You will need to plan when these need to happen, and the availability of the group. Have you built into your planning the time for individuals to complete relevant tasks and activities to bring back to the group?

Other considerations

Target audience
Your audience is a major consideration, and to perform your work to the intended target audience will benefit your project. Can you get this type of audience to come to your performance, or will you need

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to take your work to them? What is the timescale for advertising your work, or for inviting the audience?

Health and Safety
Does your performance piece need any special considerations? It is essential you risk assess your project and should consider both the development of your work and the performance outcome.

Activity 5: Identifying resources
Imagine you have been commissioned to perform a 30 minute musical theatre production as part of a local festival. As a group, discuss how you could plan for the project.
- The performance will take place in a marquee; the space can be used flexibly and you can choose where the audience will be seated.
- Identify points for consideration under each of the five headings listed above.
- Identify appropriate individual roles and responsibilities within the project.

4-7.   Hot Dog

A partner organisation can be a useful way of getting a commission brief to work towards, which will provide you with a focused project and ongoing feedback to facilitate reflection and development.

Case Study: Hot Dog
Hot Dog was a project that was developed from a series of drama workshops. The group involved wanted to pick an issue they could explore with workshop participants. They had previously looked at **Theatre in Education (TIE)** (performing arts activity that informs or instructs an audience) and now wanted to devise a piece for a local primary school.

Their rationale was to create a performance to teach children about a safety issue. They also wanted to gain experience as TIE performers and to strengthen the links with the local primary school.
The group researched appropriate safety issues. As review was going to be important to them, they wanted to find a partner who would provide factual information, check the content of the work, and also provide critical feedback to the group at key stages of its development.

Each member of the group looked for a potential partner organisation that would provide the group with a commission brief, to give focus to their project. Each suggestion was pitched to the whole group, and the selection was made.

The group decided to approach a charitable organisation that supports children and their families who fall victim to burns. The key reasons for selecting this organisation were:
- The organisation has an education programme and education officer
- The organisation was based close by
- The message of avoiding scalds and burns would be a positive message
- The issue would be of interest to the local school.

Workshop
The group were now able to plan the next stage of their project. The local primary school were holding a safety week, and the performance could be programmed into this. The group agreed with the school to design a workshop where the safety messages could be explored further. It would be from this

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workshop that the group would select the messages they felt the children had best engaged with. The charity provided the group with some factual information to use as a stimulus in the workshop.

The workshops not only generated the issues that were most engaging, but also led the group to realise that the performance could involve some pupils from the primary school as well. This would lead to peer teaching opportunities. It was agreed that this would give an additional dimension to the work, and provided the group with a more challenging set of performance requirements; they would need to perform and support young performers in the work too. Auditions were held for the primary school pupils to try out different performance styles. After this the group decided the piece should include movement, song and drama.

Scheduling

Rehearsals were planned to take place once a week at the primary school for the children to rehearse the scenes the group had devised. This way of working gave the group real planning tasks to undertake and plenty of scope for individuals to have roles and responsibilities. For example, administration roles responded to needs for clear communication between the primary school and the group that needed to be coordinated and for the communication between the charity and the group. The performance roles focused on the creation of the scene structure and content. The production roles focused on aspects of production values such as costume, props and technical equipment.

The performance event was successful in that all objectives were achieved. The ongoing input from the education officer from the charity was highlighted as a key strength as it provided a real need for genuine review. There were also clear expectations made of the performance piece, from the charity and from the audience via the staff at the primary school. The group were then able to present the project as a group, with each member of the group explaining the project from a particular individual standpoint.

Action planning

As was the case in the *Hot Dog* project, when you have decided on a theme to explore further it may be a good idea to try and explore the theme practically as well as through group discussion; this will give you a sense of the skills needed to bring the ideas into practice. It can be helpful to see early on if your ideas are going to manifest themselves in the way that you expect them to.

You will need to consider the research needed both in terms of the issue or content of your performance and in terms of the style and structure of your performance. You need to shape and develop your work in terms of content and form. When undertaking your research it can be helpful to keep focused on the overall goal; this should help prevent you going off on a tangent.

Keep focused

You will need to create a shared action plan as a group, so that you can look at how your individual role will fit into the bigger picture. It will be helpful if you can remain focused on the overview of the creative idea your group is working towards. You should fully explain the connections between the creative performance ideas and the planning processes you will use to realise them.

When you are generating group action plans and other shared evidence for your project, you should add your own individual notes in order to evidence you own thinking and understanding. You may want to ask your teacher assessor for guidance on how to do this.

Key considerations should include the areas of performance, production and administration as appropriate, and should have clear and realistic deadlines. Using these three key areas will help you to understand why a task is being done, and also to check if all aspects are being covered. You will need

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to have regular production meetings where each member of the group can feedback as to how their role is going and if any deadlines or tasks need to be reconsidered.

Keep a record
When you complete your project proposal form, and set milestones, these milestones should relate to the key deadlines in your action plan. When you are setting milestones and targets, and developing action plans, it is important to keep them practical and focused. Use language and terminology that is appropriate to the group. You should use vocational language and terms where appropriate, as long as they are understood.

You will need to decide how you are going to keep a record of the process; this may include agendas for production meetings and minutes of the meetings with your notes added and individual involvement highlighted and annotated. You may also want to keep a log book to record rehearsal techniques, and notes on the practical development of the work. This will prove to be a valuable resource when you come to write up your report, and will provide you with a layer of individual practical detail which may be lost otherwise. If you prefer, you may want to keep a video or audio diary of the process. You should reflect regularly on the work in progress in order to develop your thinking and ideas. One example would be to review your notes on a previous rehearsal in order to focus on clear objectives for the next. You can then look at these against the group action plan to check you are remaining focused on the final goal.

When you are making notes on the process, you should avoid basic description of activity and always try to explain your work and what you did in relation to a particular aspect or aspects of your project. This could include your initial project objectives, rehearsal stimulus material, individual or group research findings or desired audience expectation.

Working in a group
When planning to undertake a performance project you will most likely be working as part of a group;
- Identify your group – appropriate group size will depend on the project but usually would be between 3 and 8.
- Identify potential themes and explore them for an appropriate research question or title.
- Undertake an initial skills audit of the group.
- Research the selected themes and present ideas to check for potential research sources and your favoured performance style or genre. Keep to relevant research and avoid general practitioner histories. Keep your focus on key aspects of the social and historical context, which will actually help you with your project's aims.
- Consider target audience. Think about age group, levels of understanding of the issue to be presented and what constitutes appropriate language and content. Does your audience have an understanding of the language of theatre? Will they understand the structure of your piece? Will they appreciate the techniques used?
- Identify appropriate individual roles and responsibilities for each group member. Make sure you understand what the roles involve and how they link to each other.
- Identify achievable and clear milestones.
- Identify preferred methods of recording your work in progress.
- Identify opportunities and methods for ongoing review.
- Create a detailed initial group action plan with a timeline and realistic deadlines.
- Undertake your research and consider the structure and style of the performance piece alongside the issue and content you are communicating.
- Identify methods for developing your performance.
- Consider how you will record your performance outcome.

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- Think about how you will present your contribution to the project as an individual.
- How will you review all stages of your work against your project's aims and objectives?

Working with young children

A key feature of the *Hot Dog* project was the involvement of young children. Working with young children requires special considerations.

Activity 6: Working with young children

Design one or both of the following:

•A 20 minute team building performing arts workshop for twenty primary school pupils.
and/or
•Audition activities for a range of ages and abilities.

Plan your activities with your preferred art form(s) in mind. Consider music, drama and dance activities.

Communication

Clear communication with the primary school was an important aspect of the administration for the *Hot Dog* project.

Activity 7: Effective communication

Imagine you are the administration team supporting a performance project. You have ten weeks to create a piece of Theatre In Education (TIE) with a group of Year Four children from your local primary school, as your co-performers.

In small groups create a clear rehearsal schedule with rehearsal objectives and deadlines to support this scenario.

Partnership

Receiving a commission from a partner organisation was identified as a key strength in the evaluation of the *Hot Dog* project.

Activity 8: Identifying partnership opportunities

Either individually or as part of a group undertake initial research to identify charitable organisations in your area, who may support issue based performance. Select each organisation and match with an appropriate issue and a target audience. Pitch to each other your preferred partnership identifying its key strengths.

Project springboard

You might consider undertaking a Theatre in Education activity for you own project.
If your school or college has a link with a primary school, this could be worth exploring for your project.

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8-9. With Chips

Case study: With Chips
*With Chip*s was a project undertaken by a group of students towards their Bronze Arts Award. The general theme that the group selected to explore was European Citizenship, and to further focus their work, they decided to ask the question "What are the stereotypes people have of the British?" The target audience was their local community.

The rationale was agreed after much discussion and some initial improvisation around ideas. They wanted to create a piece of performance that would include extracts from existing repertoire. They wanted to learn about the performance techniques that related to their chosen repertoire. They sought to initiate a dialogue with another group of young people, from a different country, in order to give the work a current dynamic. Key objectives included:

- To challenge national stereotypes.
- To create a dialogue with students from another culture.
- To create a new performance piece that links existing repertoire.

Once the group had agreed the overall aim, it was time to research ideas and to find materials that could act as a stimulus for devised work. They also needed to find material that could be included in the finished piece. In order to focus their initial research they decided to find a genre that would give the performance a unity of style; they were all keen to look at the work of Berkoff. They made this decision after the group leader had led taster workshops on possible styles of work. Their decision to use extracts from the works of Berkoff gave the group a focus not only for the style of the piece, but also provided them with a few stereotypes to focus on in the piece. Other research activities also took place; media extracts were reviewed and individuals made use of the links with their prior learning in Citizenship.

They were then keen to find a group of young people they could interview (on video) from another country, in order to ask them their view on the chosen stereotypes. These included:

- Football hooligans
- Holiday makers
- Food
- Binge drinking.

Through existing relationships with a college in France, the group sent questions and the French students sent back their answers (in English). This also provided the group with video footage they could integrate into their performance.

The group now turned their attentions to their performance skills. They wanted to perform the extracts from Berkoff's plays and recognised they would need to give themselves time to identify and improve upon the performance skills needed. They created an action plan to identify relevant activities that would bring the performance together. They looked at all the stages of the development of the work, and started to give each stage a deadline, working backwards from their chosen performance date. Key stages included:

- Identifying all the relevant findings from the research they had collated and intended to include in the devising process
- Allocating individual roles; performance, production and administration
- Selecting suitable extracts from Berkoff's plays
- Selecting the video footage and editing it ready for playing in performance
- Agreeing a rehearsal schedule

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- Devising a scene structure outlined in terms of content and running time
- Checking the venue for health and safety issues and agreeing performance space
- Inviting the target audience.

In order to capture and record the process the group agreed a set of activities and tasks they would each complete. These included:
- A character mood board
- A log book
- A review of a professional performance in the same style
- A PowerPoint presentation to communicate how their research influenced their individual performance.

The group leaders facilitated discussion to aid ongoing review, and to set clear objectives for each session. The group wrote peer observations for each other in relation to their characterisation. Some sessions were videoed so the group could watch back their work in order to check its content against their research, and to be able to review their own practical work. This also provided the group with a snapshot of the work in order to suggest any modifications, particularly in relation to how effectively they were communicating their initial intention: to challenge national stereotypes.

The group were encouraged to try to link each chosen stereotype and aspects of their research to a particular scene. They were then able to review how well this had been communicated through first of all the narrative of the piece, and secondly through interpretation of character.

Skills
The cast of *With Chips* wanted to build on their performance skills. Understanding the skills you already have as a group will help you plan for your project.

Activity 9: Skills development
Complete the Skills Audit and create an individual action plan to improve on your performance skills, organisational skills and technical skills.

Audience

Activity 10: Consider your audience
Working as a group, identify issues that could challenge a specific audience. Improvise the issue using a range of performance styles and review the effect you think it will have on an audience.

Project springboard
Do you have a particular audience in mind for your project? If so, consider how you could use your knowledge of that audience to inform the development of your project. The cast of *With Chips* wanted to challenge their audience's preconceptions of national stereotypes.