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Proposal Title:

Creation-Based Learning in the Professional Arts Context

Description:

Theatre Passe Muraille has always been innovative in the creation of Canadian theatre, but where possible, we are learning how to apply those same principles to youth and community engagement practices. Our two major creation-based initiatives (Student Creation Week and Elephants in the Room Creation Group) are great examples of learning through creation, as opposed to a more traditional training model. Using guided models for mentorship, we provide opportunities for young and emerging artists to learn through inclusion in a process that mimics a professional arts context. Moreover, given that the company was founded on the power of collective creation, we have created engagement programs in that image.

Student Creation Week is a week-long initiative in which individual classes are invited into the theatre for an intensive creation process, resulting in a public presentation on stage at the end of the week. Each class is provided with a part-time Guide Artist—a catalyst to inspire each phase of the creation process, without ever acting as a director themselves. If a director emerges, they must be either a participating student or a participating teacher. In this way, a great deal of the “training” occurs through practice or trial and error. However, the Guide Artist provides a structure for creative development. And with the Guide Artist participating part-time, we avoid the common “guest artist syndrome” whereby students perceive their teachers to be less authoritative than the guest.

Elephants in the Room Creation Group was first created out of listening to the needs of the emerging artist community. Many young artists are eager to expand their networks within the artistic community, and are also looking to gain valuable experience in collective environments outside of a training institution. This program was (and is) about listening—hearing the needs of the collective, responding to them, and teaching through listening (rather than broadcasting). Now in its second year, we are continuing to develop the program with the participants, learning about the necessary next steps entirely from them.