

ideas for a bright future

open space

at assitej congress 2011



17 conversations about the future of assitej

ideas for a bright future

Report on the Open Space discussion on Saturday 21 May 2011

The Invitation

The following invitation was sent to all Congress participants:

“Bring your ideas to an open space discussion on how ASSITEJ can help artists, managers, and educators make better theatre for children and young people around the world. Meet new colleagues, debate, discover, decide on future projects.

You bring the questions, demands, concerns, and proposals to be discussed – or just join a conversation about topics like these:

- You Chat, I Chat – Let’s Act: Networking , Technology and Theatre
- Theatre is a Pre-historic Art-form: Bury it
- A Perfect System to Measure the Quality of Theatre for Children
- Are We Working for Children or Art?
- Where is Theatre Today? And Where is our Audience?
- ASSITEJ – an Organisation for the 60’s, the 80’s or the Future?
- Theatre is to Make Children Happy!

Organised by ASSITEJ UK for the ASSITEJ International Executive Committee. Facilitated by Paul Harman.”

How it Worked

49 people were present. All were invited to propose topics for discussion. Topics were posted on a chart giving the possibility of 3 sessions on twelve 'islands' as each meeting area was named. Each person then chose a topic to join and groups formed to talk about them. Not all 33 topics attracted an audience. Most topics were framed as questions or assertions. ASSITEJ should do this or that, etc. Each group took notes which were typed up immediately into a computer.

Please note that the following notes are unedited, apart from grammatical errors or misspelling of names.

The Islands were: Arran, Bornholm, Fair Isle, Faeroes, Harris, Heligoland, Harris, Lewis, Man, Orkney, Scilly, Shetland and the Isle of Dogs – (not really an island but a working class district in London Docklands.) These islands in the Northern seas were colonised by Viking raiders from different parts of Scandinavia, mostly Norway and Denmark, in the 6-900's CE

1. how to effect change and not just talk about it

11.20 Arran

Vicky Ireland (UK), Bernt Hogland (Sweden), Birute Baneviciute (Lithuania), Kim Peter Kovac (USA), Norifumi Hida (Japan/UK)

NB "Vicky wrote the notes on the big piece of paper, Kim typed it with Birute

Opening questions was: Why join ASSITEJ?

1. What is our offer? - is it strong enough?
2. ASSITEJ IS US - Individuals create change - don't look to UNCLE ASSITEJ to solve everything, or to your national centre
3. Desire to open up to more members, more individuals – and as part of this, individuals should be heard.
4. We need to make sure we're hearing the voices of everyone, not just the loud voices, not just the big Centres
5. Great that non voting members can get info but not affect policy
6. Purpose is do children's theatre better
7. Who has responsibility for policy, lobbying, marketing, and membership
8. If individuals are creating change, how is that coordinated

Members should challenge the international EC more – EC to report progress to the members every year – what has been done and not done - can you help us solve these problems and not just report every 3 years. Short updates not just minutes of EC meetings – bullet points.

1. Can Centres share information about their operations, how they work
2. EVERYONE has to fight and fight harder for money
3. ASSITEJ Manifesto – update the one Michael Fitzgerald wrote – send around the world
4. WORLD DAY messages, perhaps collect short excerpts of many of them and put into one document
5. Figure out more ways for ASSITEJ VIPs to go to countries, help them with their missions....

2.connecting the world

Orkney 10.30

We begin with a who, a what and a how:

- Who are the members of ASSITEJ?
- What roles/actions does ASSITEJ play/provide?
- How does it do this?

Who?

ASSITEJ is a collective of artists and theatre makers, not defined by regional or geographic definitions.

Who are the members? All who wish to be. Who are not members? All who don't wish to be.

Who do you ask for connections and how? By accessing less-represented countries/regions/individuals – not necessarily having to go through regional centres. Focus on individuals beyond organisations.

If opened to all individuals, varieties of type, style and quality would be apparent (no onus on quality control). But by building the web of ASSITEJ members, each artist will have more access to more peers and more work, and more quality, and so be better able to inform their own practice.

What?

ASSITEJ is a starting point. Through its website/festivals/links, it has many offshoots (Next Gen, ITYARN, Act Local Play Global etc). Through those offshoots, one can access links to specific artists and audiences. One can then choose to find out about the artist's art. You form a relationship and make new work together utilising other (not ASSITEJ) resources – they are the gateway and matchmaker

How?

By coincidence – enough interesting people and good ideas in the same place or accessed via the same web, means that interesting relationships have a good chance of happening. Where coincidence is not possible (isolated artists and communities) we have to help those coincidences to happen – ASSITEJ and artists in general have an imperative to find those people who are not attached to the ASSITEJ web and invite them in.

Finegan Kruckemeyer (Australia), Birute Baneviciute (Lithuania), Yeon Choi (Korea), Abra Chusid (USA), Kim Peter Kovac (USA), Kamiel Verwer Choi (Netherlands).

3. assitej should work even harder to engage theatre makers and children/young people from every country of the world.

11.20 DOGS

Sarah Jones (UK), Tim McGarry (Australia), Roxanne Schroder-Arce (USA), Yeon Yvette Hardie (South Africa), Omar Alvarez (Argentina), Aracelia Guerrero (Mexico), David Stothard (UK), Sug Hwon Lee Kim (Korea)

ASSITEJ must do more than simply invite countries with fewer resources. ASSITEJ must pay to assure diversity and representation from more Latin American, African, etc. delegates.

ASSITEJ should reach out to those children who don't have much cultural experiences/chances. Africa, South East Asia, etc.

What are the concrete actions to promote a really global representation beyond the differences of cultures, realities, perspectives?

REACHING OUT TO EVERYONE AND HOW?

Yvette shared some efforts in Africa, some challenges with individual gain driving members to become members, the challenge of paying for people to participate. How to avoid this problem. The need to create an agency from the bottom up. They address this issue by working with other creative networks in the areas. Start with individuals, build TYA networks, centers which join ASSITEJ center.

In Argentina, there was a closed ASSITEJ center. Everyone else made their own network. The network took over from the ASSITEJ center.

How do we help artists to organize themselves? Promote the opportunities that ASSITEJ has to offer.

Can we have congresses in SE Asia, Africa, Latin America? Is that more beneficial? Everyone would learn more, expose ASSITEJ to more people, Financial barriers are therefore removed for the people of the regions where the Congress happens.

Yvette announces that ASSITEJ Africa will attempt to have a Congress in Africa, on the tails of World Cup, but do what the WC failed and truly represent all of Africa.

In Korea, need to work with other organizations for a more business approach. There should be a professional team advocating for ASSITEJ, work should be presented through platforms, emerging artists pulled in, platforms.

We should perhaps run international platforms, showcasing in less developed countries OR collaborative platforms linking less and more developed countries. This would raise artist interest and awareness. If a less dev country hosts this kind of event, different expectations. QUESTION: if we do smaller festivals and activities every year, then there is less pressure for a BIG congress and festival and can open opportunities up to more countries and regions.

ASSITEJ needs more diversity of people, work, voices, models of work, aims of the work. Does the structure for the festival always have to be the same? Can our mentality change? Our expectations for a Festival in a less developed place should be different NOT less! Can we use existing festivals as a basis for this?

One way to involve less developed countries is to include people in decision making. For example, very exciting that a minister from Argentina is attending this festival which demonstrates the rise in interest and awareness of the need and value of ASSITEJ and TYA.

Indigenous people or certain people in countries are not represented, how do we encourage centers to include. Constitution is about to change and this may effect this. ASSITEJ EC is enforcing the constitution and this is important. Must still be positive and inclusive while doing this.

Different level of members may help this. Stop it being so closed. May be indigenous, youth theatre affiliate member. More inclusion.

ASSITEJ making direct interventions such as the international workshops held in Rwanda and Uganda strengthened centers, brought in individuals. ‘

EC went to Rwanda, this was very helpful to support TYA and the arts generally.

More smaller meetings in different areas of the world.

One company touring to a different area of the region creates a buzz for all. ASSITEJ needs to go to more places.

Festival SHOULD NEVER be back to back in the same continent.

Professional label as membership is exclusive. We need to be inclusive and promote different models.

How do we reach out to the places that are not represented in ANY WAY in ASSITEJ?

There are regional networks that are supposed to reach out to and identify those areas/countries/cultures not represented. This has worked recently with Rwanda and Ghana.

Should ASSITEJ be more active in identifying these places? Should there be a structured way of communicating this to the secretary general? Is this the best way? Good work has been happening in China. The identifying of these places happens sometimes but is sporadic and ad-hoc.

4. more exchange

Arran 12.30

EC / World Congress every 3 years (no change)

Assitej to meet every year (mini Congress)

Eg: success of Next Generation: if NG hadn't been invited to Linz, would they have met and collaborated as often? Been as successful?

Identify current festivals and ask them to expand

Invite Assitej

Provide spaces to discuss / present work

Offers prestige to smaller festivals (the world is coming)

Annual meeting changes country every year

Opportunity to visit and support countries ie: India, South America, Africa

Different people given different opportunities to engage with Assitej

ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

- EC must be there
- General Assembly – opportunity to continually develop eg: constitution
- Include more people
- Open up Assitej

5. promote research and development of techniques to truly hear, see and understand the viewpoints of children.

10.30 Lewis

ASSITEJ can and should find a way to involve children in the structure of ASSITEJ International, for example, by involving them in decision making when appropriate.

Find a balance between theatre for / by / with children.

How can ASSITEJ help strengthen / create links between theatres, theatre professionals and schools.

Vigdis Jakobsdottir (Iceland), Sandile Ndzimanadze (Swaziland), Rebecca Goode (UK), Chris Matragos, (USA/UK), Glen R Johns (Australia), Varis Klausitaijs (Latvia), Carol Jones (USA)

6. assitej should not only focus on productions at a *high* artistic level, but also find ways to show how many *bad* productions there are for children all over the world.

10.30 Bornholm

How do we define quality and in different cultures? It is elusive

1. Could each Centre organise a mentoring team or individual mentors to help to give advice and feedback?
2. Can centres do more re. sharing work-in-progress, see each other's work – sharing is not sweet and pious, it is essential for growth.
3. Are we and should we be artistic judges?
4. The power of the critics for good or bad? Can help to improve and challenge
5. First experience of theatre for a child is critical
6. How do we promote good work and how do we help good work?
7. Why do we get so angry and upset about bad work?
8. Should Centres have boards to advise parents and teachers somehow
9. Each centre to be encouraged to have a list of members and work to be accessed in some way by ticket buyers
10. We need money from ASSITEJ International to send mentors around the world to help practitioners
11. Or – we need to find the way for centres to be proactive and do this for themselves, become more of a family and inclusive
12. What are the tools we need to assess quality?
13. Bad work can be because companies are only seeking financial return or that funded companies have become lazy and lost their edge. They are too secure and don't care
14. How do we find the language to discuss and evaluate, without being judgemental?

7. assitej international support fund

Dogs 9.30

Solange Perazzo (Argentina), Jacob Boehme (Australia), Maria Ines Falconi (Argentina), Sug Hwan Lee (Korea)

Principles

1. Change Philanthropy (meaning help for poor people) to “funding”
2. Patronage/ support
3. ASSITEJ is only funded through membership. Assembly/Committee decides how to distribute.
4. Approach International Organizations- UNESCO, etc.
5. Create an independent budget for projects independent from ASSITEJ-budget
6. Develop a committee to research/source funding
7. EC makes decisions on funding distribution
8. Special programme/consideration to people/projects/artists from countries in need.

Examples

1. travel (delegates to congress/international meetings)
2. support projects
3. Scholarships/PD- international exchange, residency.
4. Is it annual- triennial?
5. Receive applications every year/ time is different in International projects
6. Support International exchange programs

What are the benefits?

1. Will support projects / ideas ASSITEJ does not support
2. Now, ASSITEJ Centres have the responsibility
3. Could help to make ASSITEJ International an INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION
4. PROMOTION

Should the EC distribute funds?

1. Half and half? 50%? Match funding?
2. Projects to be supported are within ASSITEJ Working Program
3. International collaboration
4. What are the criteria?
5. Who decides?

6. Programming has to be an answer to ASSITEJ Centers needs, expression of interest from outside to EC

Where and how will ASSITEJ International get the money?

1. For example in Australia exists the ABAF and South America MECENAZGO
2. Multinational companies support specific projects/ideas. For example South African support, ITYARN support
3. For the Congress: At least support one member from each Centre to cover fee, airfare, accommodation, etc.

8. make national centres more *international*

11.20 Heligoland

Maswati Dlodlu (Swaziland), Magdalena Szpak, Alicja Morowska-Rubczak, Maciej Wojtyczko (Poland), Jorge Padin (Spain), Glen R Johns, Jim Lawson (Australia)

How can we make national centres more international, - including development for emerging centres

A visitor exchange program between ASSITEJ Centres.
Looking at the ways of working of each Centre. Successful existing programs.

In particular for emerging centres this can be useful.
And a way for established centres to share intellectual property and assist to build capacity.
A low cost exchange. One or two personnel making it achievable.

Specific projects are also a possibility. Models already existing within ASSITEJ but the VISITORS program is a separate and distinct project.

There are issues of effective communication exist between countries.
Submitting information, receiving. National centres across the board need to inform other centres of their work, their programs and opportunities. Via the International centre as well as on local websites.

Proposal: ASSITEJ engage dedicated communication personnel
Engage young translators for projects, playwriting projects and connect with Interplay and *write local. play global.*

There may be opportunity to develop international connections for similar projects. New drama translations but possibly for other ASSITEJ projects

International festivals for Young People – how to grow these.
Opportunities for collaboration and hosting

Institute a Youth Arts market at ASSITEJ triennial Congress and festivals

Develop a model for international companies to showcase and sell work which includes venues and producers with a selection criteria set up by national centres. A list of plays from each centre

9. lobby for greater understanding and support for the importance of the work of ASSITEJ and TYA

Minutes by Glenn Tillin for Isle of Bornholm 12.00pm

How should the EC Lobby for greater understanding and support for the importance of the work of ASSITEJ and TYA

Definitions of “to Lobby”:
Influence, Promote, Challenge, Encourage,

“Bang your head against the door”

How to Lobby: Publish research/report on how governments view the relevance of and do to support TYA ion general: Show best practice models.

Lobby world governments with findings: UNESCO

Members of EC possibly attend world summits and represent case for ASSITEJ.

EC should make statement or Manifesto of practice for National ASSITEJ to follow in respect to discussion with national political situation.

Do Not Give Up! If you give up you lose!

We Lobby to put the interests of Children and Young people first.

Why Is this not Happening? We need a better Voice

Seek advocacy of Politicians’ with a political voice

Look for universal declarations and international policies that support our case. E.g.: How can TYA help to meet the “Millennium Goals”?

10. what sort of projects should assitej initiate and support?

Bornholm 11.20

Solange Perazzo, Vigdis Jakobsdottir (Iceland), Fraser Corefield, Glenn Tillin, (Australia), Maria Ines Falconi (Argentina)

A fringe festival for companies doing theatre for young audiences. Uncurated Festival with a mix of youth companies and professional companies.

Build a better website! Use information technology to a greater extent to provide information practising artists about festivals and networks.

ASSITEJ should have a more *hands on* approach to projects.

Professional *good practice* professional development event (such as workshops and seminars) for artists working with young people.

Project where artists from three or more countries respond to the same stimulus on-line.

Inter-regional workshops on specific themes. (Using the taboo-workshop structure).

Playwriting contest with age categories. Winning plays would be published and free to use for at least a year for theatre companies around the world.

Link ASSITEJ to the *World Interplay* project.

11. more art! (is assitej about art or rather art politics?)

Ivica Simic (Croatia), Johanna Figl (Austria)

How should we discuss artistic work?

No more discussions about the 'Child', let's discuss art.

Children as our audience is the basic starting point underlying everything anyway.

Why do we make a difference between theatre and theatre for young audiences in an artistic discourse?

Should we talk about Quality and Content rather than Marketing?

Only ASSITEJ has the role to promote theatre arts for young audiences.

What is the VISION of the artists

The starting point and red thread of international collaborations should be the artistic process and challenge. Often they seem to happen for strategic or political reasons instead.

ITYARN: Artists and researchers should work together.

Change the Constitution of ASSITEJ to have more focus on art.

ASSITEJ must initiate more projects that deal with artistic topics. Be more proactive and draw attention to it.

Out of 33 topics proposed at the Open Space only 3 are about art!

12. assitej projects -don't reinvent the wheel

10.30 Scilly

Notes: Yvette Hardie (South Africa): Robert Chirima, Marisa Gimenez Cacho (Mexico), Aracelia Guerrero(Mexico), Nina Hajjianni (UK)

Create long-term projects that can build their brand over time, as well as their systems. e.g. Taboo project could continue in different parts of the world with new taboos being explored. We suggest that Assitej International looks at the projects that are currently working, and analyses the systems and processes that work.

First step: Identify the different wings of Assitej, the potential or actual projects, which may come from the EC or from individuals, companies, centres...

- Taboo project
- Research (ITYARN)
- Advocacy for children's rights
- Festivals
- Exchange projects - New Faces
- Youth/Child ambassadors Similar seminars for music in TYA, scenography in TYA etc where artistic ideas and competencies can be developed
- Director's seminar
- New Visions New Voices (in Australia, Africa etc...)
- Projects related to Small Size network

Second step: Understands what works in the projects and what systems need to be in place; look at who will take responsibility for each project, what activities, timeframes

Third Step: identify the people who are passionate, involved, want to take the project forward, there should be individual/ centre based agency – not top down

Fourth step: look at monitoring and evaluation of the project, reporting back to Assitej, marketing of the project's success to the broader community Assitej to oversee, receive reports, and communicate about projects.

13. do we need to *define* a future for assitej so assitej will *have* a future?

Several topics did not attract enough people to merit a full discussion.

It is the nature of Open Space that participants may choose which topics to propose and which they want to discuss.

If people feel the discussion is boring or has reached a point of conclusion, they are encouraged to walk away, perhaps to join another group.



14. how can assitej (national and international) come closer to the individual artist?

10.30 Heligoland:

Additional Topic: What is the relationship between an actor / actress in a small village and ASSITEJ International?

Membership – who belongs and why?

From local work – to national centre – to international centre.

Information & Motivation – distributing both. (Often members are not very well informed by their national centres about the activities of other centres and ASSITEJ International)

How to stimulate and how to get members for ASSITEJ International?

Why are there no common “rules”, systems applied in every centre? Or: why does every centre have its own way of working, own rules...

What does the member get from ASSITEJ? Is it a question of money, benefit, resources...

Suggestions:

1. creating platforms
2. opening networks
3. more international meetings – annual (smaller) world congress?
4. Individuals should be able to join ASSITEJ International without needing to be a member of a national centre – quicker distribution of information
5. International co-operations are more likely to happen through annual meetings, the distribution of information would work quicker and easier, too.

15. how could assitej link individual artists?

Orkney 11.20

ASSITEJ is an international organisation. It should support and facilitate the international work. The members should work for it.

NEW FACES PROGRAM links trainees, students and new comers
Assitej should also link professionals.

Suggestions:

1. Swap places between companies - for example exchange of directors, choreographers etc
2. A data bank of free lance artists who want to work internationally
3. Collected information about international funding systems

Congress and festivals contain meeting points, workshops for exchange projects. Platforms for presenting new ideas. The future congress organizer should invite at least one international co-production as an example of international collaboration and present the process.



16. how can assitej international market its identity to new and emerging artists?

Shetland: 10:30

Timothy Hutchinson (UK), David Stothard (UK), Bernt Hogland (Sweden), Sarah Jones (UK/New Zealand), Jim Lawson (Australia), Tim McGarry (Australia)

1. Raising the profile of the National Centres
2. Linking and educating training providers (i.e. Drama Schools/Universities) – the provision of training opportunities/workshops for new artists.
3. National Centres to create ambassadors to spread the word.
4. Create a global brand and increase branding through theatre company memberships.
5. Promoting relationships and sharing resources between longstanding National Centres and those that are less established.
6. Take risks in festival programming of new and emerging artists.
7. Promoting and documentation of success stories (i.e. – the work of Finnegan Kruckemeyer).
8. More members = more presence, through promotion of International opportunities.
9. Dedicated marketing staff to promote Assitej.
10. Improve media – particularly social media presence, sharing the responsibility disseminating this information between the National Centres.

17. can assitej be better at communicating its achievements?

Is the newsletter an effective tool? Could it be clearer? The organisation is all about dissemination of information but tangible outcomes drive interaction and activity

Communication should be driven by individual artists rather than companies.

Increase communication between national Centres and ASSITEJ International. We want regular activities that drive a NEED to communicate.

Congress 2011 has the highest number of countries involved than any other – a huge achievement.

This is a transition period. The structure of ASSITEJ was established in a different world in 1965.

Develop a new communication strategy. Look at revising the systems and processes for ASSITEJ as an organisation.

Funding is driven and supported by projects rather than ideas.

ASSITEJ is a platform for communication and exchange. It is not an arts market.

ASSITEJ can and should drive discussion about quality, collaboration, and best practice.

Outcomes:

Establish a series of projects to drive the need to communicate.

EC to develop a new communication strategy and revise processes.

ASSITEJ Open Space 2011 Malmo, Sweden 21 May

Participants:

Alicia Morawska-Rubczak, Poland
alicja.rubczak@gmail.com

Magdalena Szpak, Poland
magszpak@gmail.com

Chris Matragos, England/USA
cmatragos@gmail.com

Rebecca Goode, England
rgoode140@bruford.ac.uk

Tim Hutchinson, England
thutchinson141@bruford.ac.uk

Iva Gruic, Croatia
iva.gruic@ufzg.hr

Aracelia Guerrero, Mexico
atraccionesmeteoro@gmail.com

Tim McGarry, Australia
tim@monkeybaa.com.au

Varis Klausitajs, Latvia
klausitajs.varis@gmail.com

Robert Chirima, Zimbabwe
robertchirima@yahoo.com

Sandile Ndzimandze, Swaziland
rsndzimande@hotmail.com

Jim Lawson, Australia
director@ypaa.net

Carolina Malta, Brasil
carolinamet100@gmail.com

Glen R. Johns, Australia
glenrjohns@bigpond.com

Solange Perazzo, Argentina
solangeperazzo@gmail.com

Roxanne Schroeder-Arce, USA
rarce1@yahoo.com

Nina Hajjiyanni, England
theatreproject@hotmail.com

Sarah Jones, Wales
messupthemess@hotmail.com

Johanna Figl, Austria
j.figl@sbw.at

Katrina Karlsen, Denmark
katrine@graense-loes.dk

Vicky Ireland, UK
vicky.Ireland@virgin.net

Kim Peter Kovac, USA
kpkovac@Kennedy-center.org

Maria Ines Falconi
mifalconi@argentores.org.ar

Katariina Metsalampi, Finland
katariina.metsalampi@assitejfi.org

Vigdís Jakobsdóttir, Iceland
vidgjsjak@gmail.com

Omar Alvarez, Argentina
info@omaralvareztiteres.com.ar

Glenn Tillin, England
glenntillin@yahoo.co.uk

Abra Chusid, USA
abra.Chusid@gmail.com

David Stothard, UK
david@olivebandtheatre.com

Jorge Padín, Spain
gazapopadin@hotmail.com

Wolfgang Schneider, Germany
schneider@uni-hildesheim.de

Ivica Šimić, Croatia
ivica@ASSITEJ-international.org

Yvette Hardie, South Africa
yvette@hardie.co.za

Stephen Rabl, Austria
s.rabl@dschungelwien.at

Marisa Gimenez Cacho, Mexico
marisagcacho@yahoo.com.mx

Noel Jordan, Australia
noeljordan@inet.net.au

Fraser Corfield, Australia
fraser@atyp.com.au

Norifumi Hida, UK/Japan
n.hida@warwick.ac.uk

Hedda Munthe, Norway
heddamu@gmail.com

Hiroko Oshima, Germany/Japan
oshimas@mac.com

Bernt Hoglund, Sweden
bernt.hoglund@bornet.net

Yeon Choi, South Korea
onlyhana@hotmail.com

Jacob Boehme, Australia
jacob@idja.com.au

Sug Hwan Lee, Korea
lealee@dreamwiz.com

Maswati Dlodlu
maswatidlodlu@yahoo.com

Finegan Kruckemeyer, Australia
ziggy_ramage@hotmail.com

Bridgette van Leuven, Australia
bvleuven@sydneyoperahouse.com

Maciej Wojtyszko
wojtyszko@ipgate.pl

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Facilitator

Paul Harman, UK
paul.harman63@ntlworld.com



ideas for a bright future ... *...assitej open space 2011*

executive summary: **themes**

More

Participants wanted to enhance many assitej activities: more meetings, more open debates, more sharing of experience.

International projects

assitej should raise money to organise and direct collaborative projects

Individual Artists

more support for linking up individuals outside large organisations

Lobbying

assitej should be active in promoting TYA politically

Research and Quality Control

centres should be more active in combating bad theatre for children

Promote Ourselves

assitej should engage with emerging artists and encourage development in all countries of the world

More Art!

Out of 33 topics proposed only THREE were about ART!



PH Malmo 2011