

HE OPEN LAB EVALUATION REPORT

Survey evaluation of higher education lab

ARTWORKS LONDON

April 2014

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1 DESCRIPTION

1.1 Introduction

The idea to produce a HE LAB emerged from a learning seminar with a range of London based HE partners on the 18 March 2013. It has been designed to respond to the desire for more collaborative working and the development of a critical framework for participative practice.

The content of this LAB was developed with four specific HE partners.

Those partners were;

Helena Gaunt – Guildhall School

Veronica Jobbins – Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance

Sue Mayo – Goldsmiths University

Selina Busby – Central School of Speech and Drama

The HE LAB took place on 31 March – 03 April 2014. It was facilitated by Gerri Moriarty, a cultural consultant and community theatre practitioner. This LAB allowed students to experiment, interrogate and explore the creative and artistic seeds of their participatory practice, as well as encourage 'blue sky thinking' which we feel is essential to give a critical framework to participative practice. This LAB has allowed us to assess the LAB environment as an effective cross art and cross institution learning structure for participatory practice.

The key enquires for ArtWorks London are;

- How can the attributes of the LAB model, embodying experimentation and collaboration with a focus on developing practice (a kin to more established artists), support the learning of students and emerging artists at post graduate level in participatory practice.
- How can the cross arts, cross institution approach for this LAB improve the learning experience for single Art Form students.
- How can the open and experimental experience of the LAB environment still support the attainment of students fixed learning objectives?

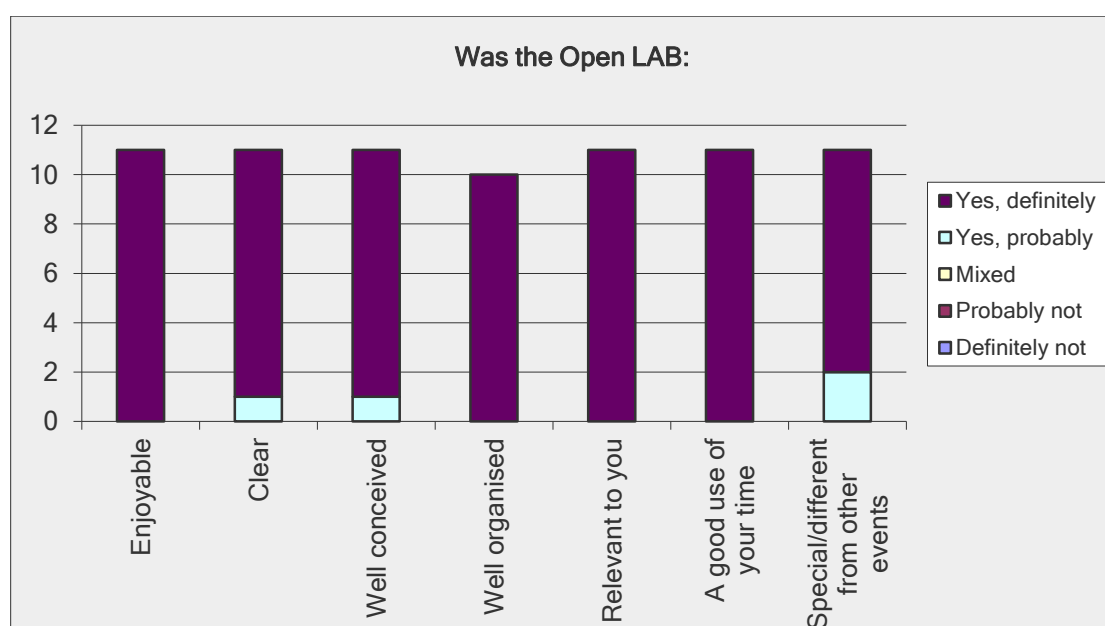
2 EVALUATION

2.1 Introduction

We received 11 responses, a 100% response rate. Our methodological approach was quantitative, we received 11 responses to a survey which sought to explore how successful the LAB environment is in supporting the development of cross arts, cross institution postgraduate students concerned with participatory practice. Our survey design provided the opportunity for a qualitative response in the form of open questions.

2.2 Process

Respondents were very positive about the process with 100% of respondents stating that they definitely found the experience enjoyable, well organised and relevant to them. 100% of respondents probably or definitely found the project well conceived, a good use of their time, clear and special/different from other events.



Further comments suggest that this LAB provided a unique environment, fundamentally different to the environment provided at their current HEI's. This seemingly has had an impact on students' confidence and supported the development of their practice.

"Very well organised and enjoyable. Nice to be surrounded by other postgraduate students like minded and creative."

"As a student we don't get enough time to develop our practice artistically. It was amazing and so needed to experiment with other artists and have more time to reflect. We don't have enough time for reflection as artists and practitioners. Very interesting to be able to collaborate and explore concepts with people in different art-forms."

"Participant - led experimental lab, where we have the time, space and opportunity to play and explore our individual practices. More please :-)"

"Really unique (for me) experience gained a new approach to seeking answers, insights into areas of interest and reference points for own practice which can be/feel very isolating."

"The week was well hosted, developed and organised. There was plenty of opportunity to share your thoughts and reflections, and to change the shape of the programme if need be. This was definitely something I needed at this point in my MA and has given me back much of the confidence I had lost in my creative abilities."

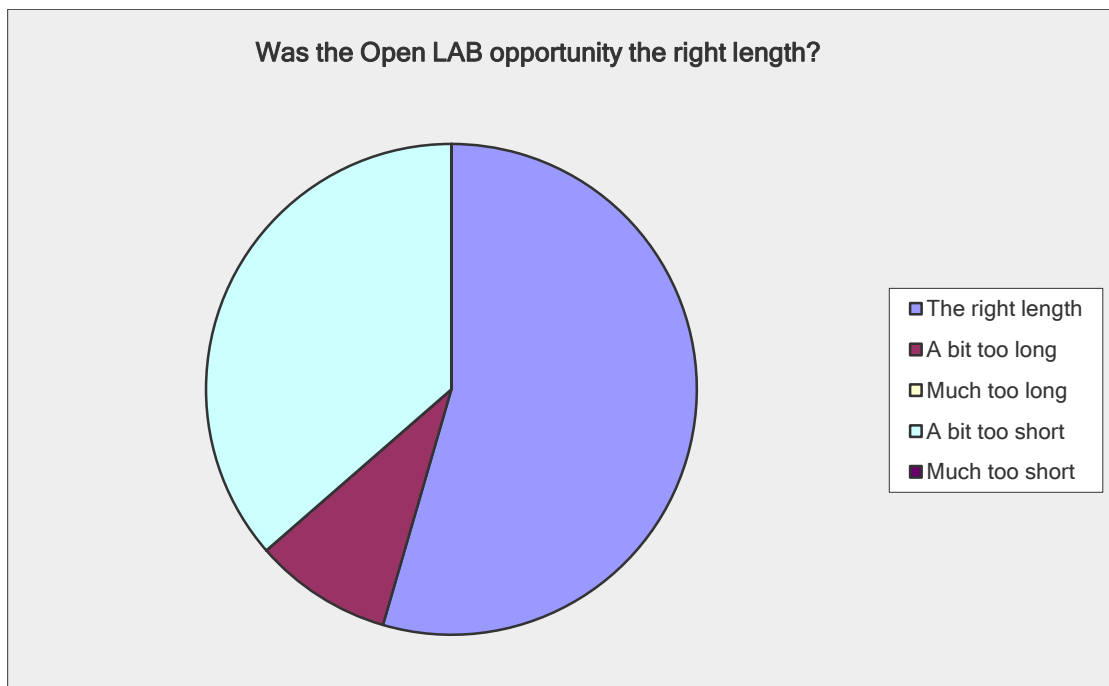
"Gerri our facilitator created a very good structure for the four days. Everybody felt like they had the chance to contribute to this Lab. There were many issues that we touched and felt very relative to me as an artist working in the community. There was good time given for creating, discussing, composing and reflecting."

"This was an opportunity to sit down with an ensemble of others in very similar stages of their study and realise the significant knowledge we hold. It allowed me to remember to hold still and begin to listen to those so close to me."

"It is the first time I have felt I have stuff to bring to the table. Being given the space and freedom to share has been career changing."

"Very open, allowing us to guide our own exploration with your interests. Great to have the opportunity to think deeply with other creative intelligent people."

Respondents had a mixed response to the length of the Open Lab experience with 54.5% of respondents citing that the LAB was at the right length, and 36.4% citing that the experience was a bit too short. It is important to note that the LAB was only 4 days long as opposed to 5 days as normal. This decision was made due to the availability of the students.



The further comments suggest that the students would have benefitted from more time, but only if rest and reflection time was built in to the assigned time period. This is an interesting point to consider when producing LAB's for post Graduate students with heavy workloads and limited capacity.

"Any longer than 4 days would be too much perhaps even finishing at 5 rather than 6 would be better."

"It's better to leave wanting more and with such positive energy."

"A longer time period would have allowed us to explore and experiment further. But it would have been good to intersperse a longer lab with days of break to allow for rest and reflection."

"Such great possibilities - I wanted to keep going. Time pressures meant that some exercises/discussions had to be cut short."

"I would suggest having other weeks with less people so each person has a whole day or half a day."

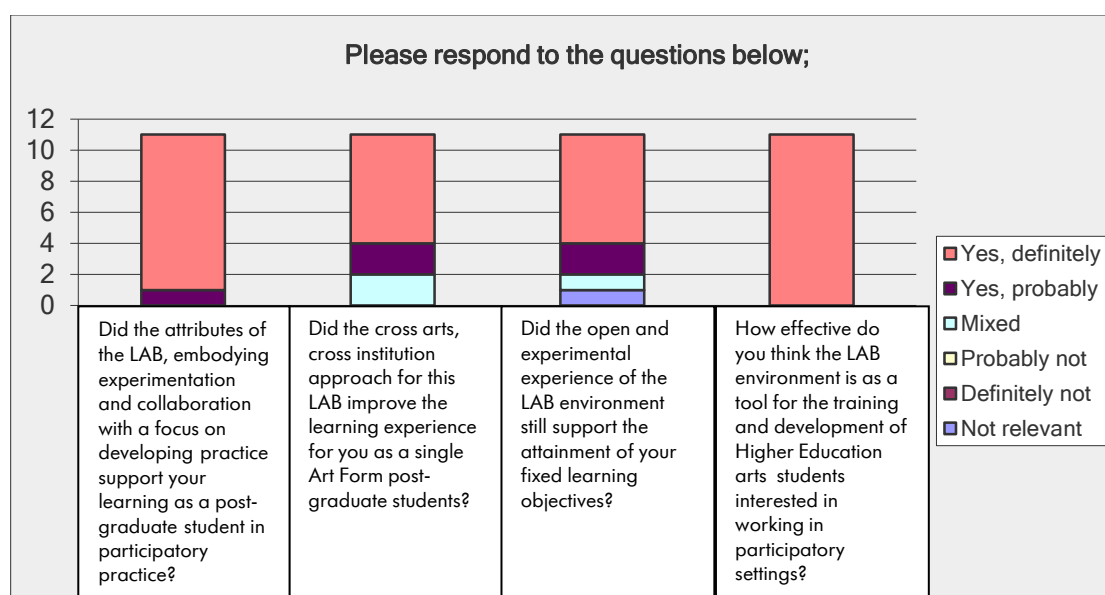
"I was very tired by the end of the third day but it was manageable."

"We needed this time to be able to build things gradually to have the time to meet each other and work with each other"

"A week would have felt more complete"

2.3 Outcomes

100% of respondents said that this LAB experience definitely or probably supported their learning as a post graduate student of participatory practice. 100% of respondents said that the LAB environment was an incredibly effective tool for the training and development of higher education arts students interested in working participatory settings. 81.8% of respondents said that the cross arts and cross institution LAB experience definitely or probably improved their learning experience as single art form students. 63.6% of respondents said that the LAB experience definitely or probably supported the attainment of their fixed learning objectives.



The further comments suggest that the cross arts/cross institution aspect would have been more impactful if the split between art forms had been more even. In this case, 18.2% or participants were 'dance', 36.4% were 'theatre' and 45.5% were 'cross arts'. There was a

strong feeling that this type of LAB environment is 'necessary' and essential for postgraduate students interested in participatory practice.

"I will draw on my experiences. Great insight into other art forms but sometimes the ratio wasn't balanced - little physicality. Very worthwhile."

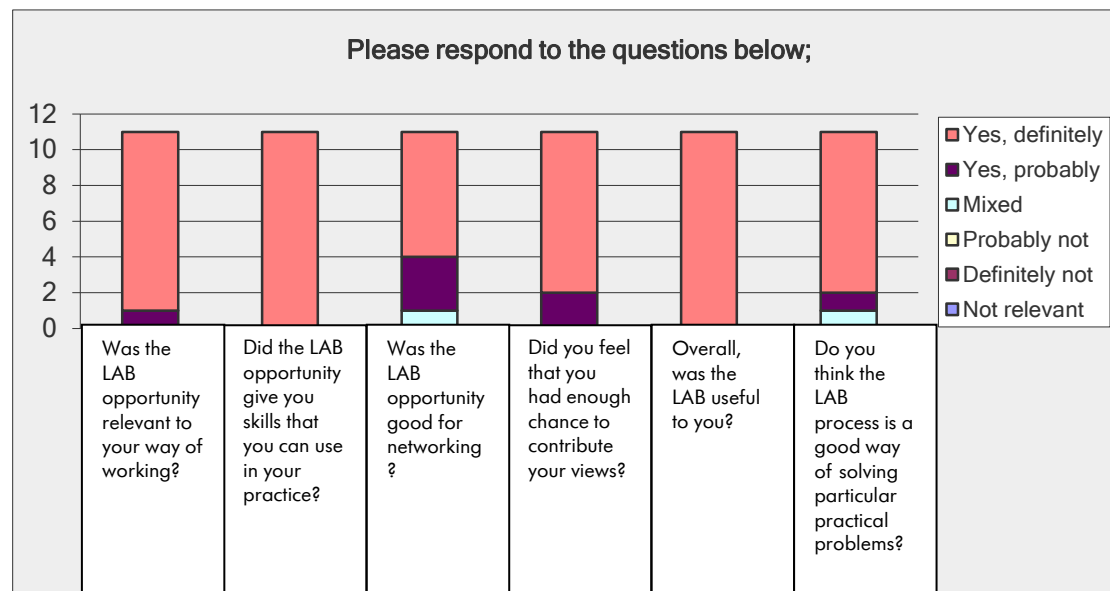
"There needed to be more people from different art forms. Not sure I had a fixed learning objective. Very effective to have time to step away from the practice and focus on us in a different way"

"There were not enough students from other disciplines. We deepen out practice/art when we have time and space to experiment and explore."

"Chance to embody ideas and use theatre to interrogate academic assumptions - many on the applied theatre course don't always get this. Movement approach as a way of finding meaning and not just generating interest. The change to try and fail activities in a safe space and open up thinking to new ways of working."

"I will be using what I have done for my dissertation. It meant that we never got bogged down in theory. We met all of my learning objectives. This Lab was not only effective it's necessary!! Participatory is inherently a creative environment and therefore we NEED opportunities to be creative!"

100% of respondents said the LAB experience was definitely or probably relevant to their way of working. 100% of respondents said that this enabled them to develop skills that they can use in their practice. 90.9% of respondents cited that the LAB experience was definitely or probably good for networking. 100% of respondents cited that the LAB experience definitely or probably gave them enough opportunity to contribute their views. 100% of respondents said that the LAB was useful to them. 90.9% said that the LAB experience was definitely or probably a good way to solve practical problems.



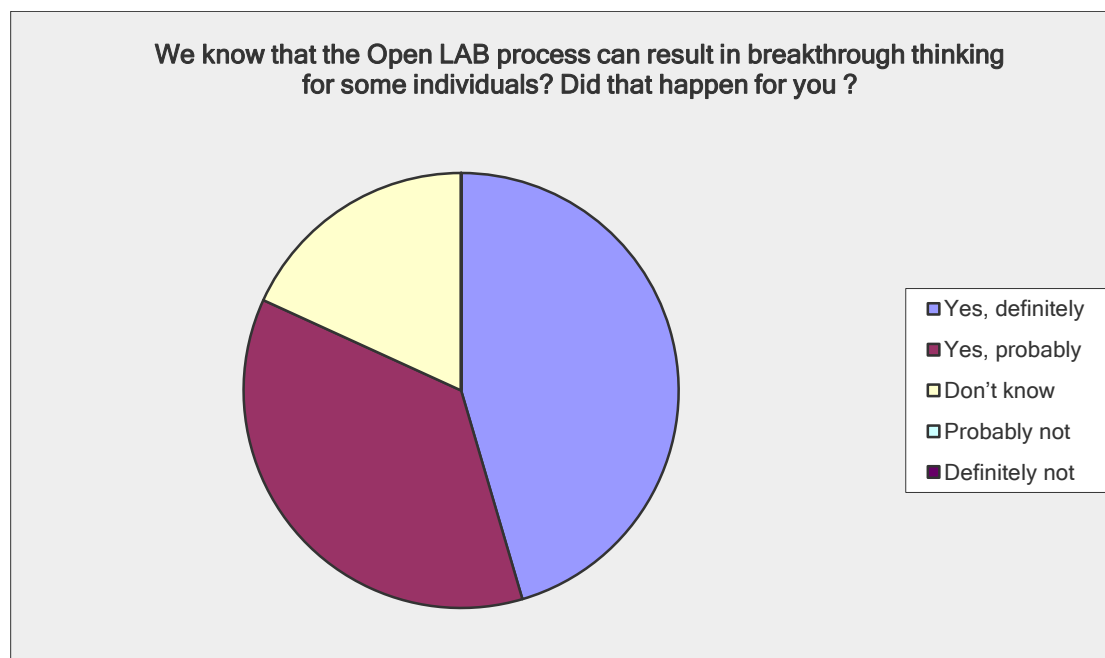
Further comments supported these positive responses.

"It was a breath of fresh air to explore in a different way"

"I love collaboration. Fresh new ideas."

"Absorbing others practice and reflect on the self. Insight into movement. I know a lot of the people before so not so good for networking. Pushed through many complex areas. Great way to open conversation and offer new ways to seek solutions." "It gave me confidence in my thinking"

81.9% of respondents said that the LAB process resulted in break through thinking for them.



100% of respondents said that the LAB process gave them new insights;

"I may use certain skills I've learnt here in my practice but can't say whether they are breakthrough. I felt more secure in my practice, gained a lot of confidence and clarity in what I do when having to convey it to others."

"Movement as a starting point. Everyone has something to bring and connecting your head and body - not just saying this but actually doing it! Confidence artistically!"

"Putting my theories into practice was invaluable. Open space principles. Structured critical response. Incorporating movement into devising."

"How movement, physical exploration of academic questions really works."

"I've developed a whole new way of approaching my work. By experiencing other people's way of facilitation and their subject matter I learned a lot about how my own practice might be shaped - either similarly or differently. Hearing others share their experiences."

"The critical importance of combining different arts practices/tools/skills in any creative work - we gain so much depth and scope when we learn/work with many different aspects of ourselves: 'mind', emotion, movement, sound. How differently we can express one idea through different media."

"Reinventing how we deliver - approach certain mediums like dance - theatre etc. when working with people that are not necessarily trained in those areas. How much input as an artist you are allowed/can put in this kind of project. What can be your objectives?"

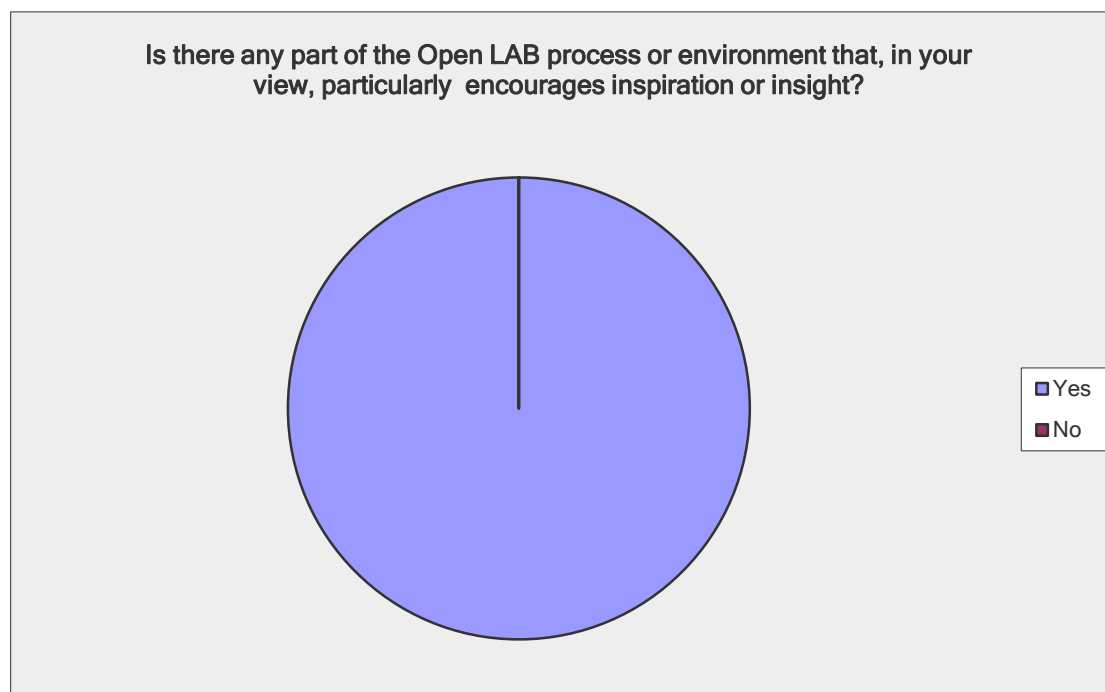
"That many facilitation problems cannot be solved in academic thinking - despite the conversation led approach - this took us away from theory"

"Creative regarding ideas and ways of facilitating. More trust in the dynamic of the group. More trust and confidence in myself and my practice."

"I feel more a sense of direction. That I learnt so much from others in similar positions to myself. I can apply theory in a practical sense."

"Helped me develop my future work in schools working with forum theatre. Loved open space thinking, and structured critical response."

Respondents were asked to comment on [whether or not why](#) they felt this LAB environment encourages [insight](#) and inspiration. 100% of respondents said yes.



Further comments suggest that this is related to the space, time and openness to explore.

"To witness others creativity and variety of ways in which it manifests - was very inspiring, Also to have such support and encouragement."

"Space, time, freedom"

"Overall - possibility of thinking about how we define our work"

"The space was fantastic. The freedom given by the facilitator to own the space at the start of the week gave me a real sense of trust, by them in us. Reflection time was really important."

"Having participants propose their enquiries to the group and working with different participants' ideas, as well as having your peers' work with your own enquiry."

"When working on ideas of constructing material with the use of particular tools. Tools as they derive from different mediums."

"The time we were allowed to discuss, particularly in the first 2 days."

"The respect and trust in all participants work and the careful and well balanced structure. The safety that encourages free creation without judgement."

"Space. Excellent facilitation of choice and understanding of practice."

"Lovely space, bean bags and relaxed environment"

2.4 Overall views

Respondents were asked to comment on what they felt worked well in the LAB process. The comments suggest that the openness of the environment and freedom to explore individual practice was a significant factor in the success of the LAB.

"The dance network and find similarities in cross art forms."

"That it was SO open, that it was so intensive - 4 days consecutively, really helped as intense space which released some negativity I have never been able to explore before."

"Group collaboration, bouncing ideas, having the freedom to experiment, awesome facilitation, open structure, the space was ideal! Time for reflection."

"Acceptance of many voices (including mine!) Variety of possibilities and develop an experience over a few days. Taking part in group creative activities collaborating with dancers, positive and constructive feedback."

"Huge learning experience to engage intensively with artists from a dance background - The mixture of totally open space and time to explore ideas among people with so many varied skills and backgrounds."

"The fact that we have been given some structure during the 4 days. Because it is important that people are given the responsibility of being self-organised and complying with time and tasks to make this project happen. The 'no outcome' structure and the very soft almost invisible facilitation"

"The highly creative level of work. The learning of new ways of facilitating and structuring workshops. Most of all cross discipline working."

"Collaboration, freedom to explore, safety to express."

"Openness, freedom and ownership over our work."

Respondents were also asked what worked less well in the LAB process. The comments suggest that the LAB experience would have been vastly improved if the art form split and institution was more of an equal division. In this instance 72% of participants were from the Applied Theatre course at Central School of Speech and Drama.

"Sometimes bogged down by too much analysis - a lot of talking"

"I would have enjoyed getting to know Gerri a little more."

"Not enough people from other schools or backgrounds."

"So much crammed into a short amount of time meant I couldn't fully focus at all times. I felt I missed bits. Only having 1 hour to work on your idea. Getting too bogged down in philosophical discussions but Gerri was excellent at controlling this."

"The Predominance of theatre practitioners - it would have been interesting to have more dancers and definitely musicians."

"The unequal time we spent analysing and experimenting practically with some ideas"

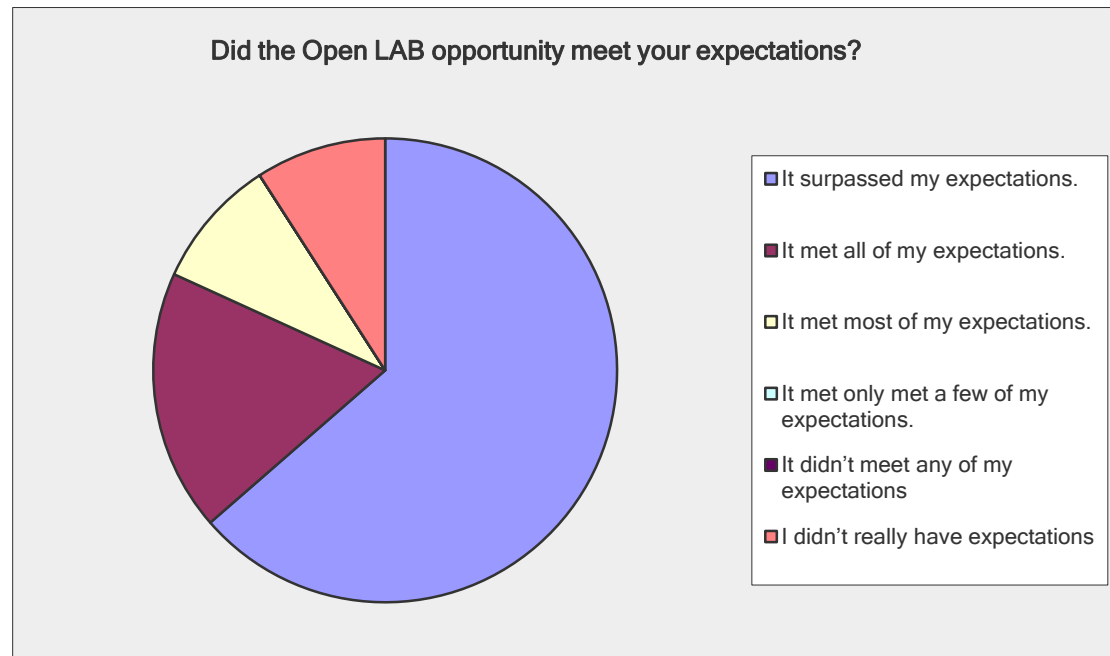
"Too many students from the same masters programme"

"The great emphasis on applied theatre practice as most of the participants were AT practitioners"

"Perhaps the option not to show - as a person I need to be pushed."

"Would be nice to work with musicians, filmmakers and visual artists as well."

Respondents were asked if this LAB opportunity met their expectations. 63.6% of respondents said that this experience surpassed their expectations. A further 27.3% of respondents said it met all or most of their expectations. 9.1% of respondents cited that they didn't really have any expectations.



2.5 The future

Respondents were asked if there any particular issues they think should be considered when using the LAB environment to explore participatory practice. The comments mainly related to space, environment and the diversity of participants.

"I know it has already been considered but post graduates from more disciplines would be great."

"Diversity of participants"

"Ownership? Voice of practitioner in process facilitator approach or 'personality' and the effect of this."

"Just ensuring that everyone feels that they have had enough time to try out their idea. And making sure that they know how to prepare/plan their session to get the most out of it."

"I think the balance between participants of different arts practices is very important/ If there is a group that dominates the lab it is not as exploratory."

"The experience and willingness of participants to respond to any work shared between them. How much time is given for self-exploration and collaborative work to happen?"

"Environment. This space worked well because it is comfortable - we didn't feel pressure to perform"

"The acknowledgement that it is a different environment with different qualities and dynamics of the actual participatory practice"

Respondents were also asked if there are any particular issues when using the LAB environment with

post graduate students. These comments seemed to relate to the importance of the choice of facilitator and the focussing on 'doing' as opposed to 'talking'.

"Choose the facilitator wisely - Gerri was great but I imagine it would be very different with someone else."

"Whilst I valued the openness of this lab, I would be interested in a more specifically focussed lab in order to explore ideas to greater depth."

"Just don't get too absorbed in discussion/theory because PG students spend the rest of the year doing that!"

"The technique of their subject they are able to share. How much of the artistic creative skills they have developed being in that level of study are able to share and exchange."

"Terminology. Sometimes because of our different uses of the term 'applied' or 'community' it created exclusion."

Respondents were asked if they had any reflections on how the LAB might be used within an undergraduate context. Comments suggested that a similar model should be implemented in this context, but that the level of facilitation and guidance needs to be increased.

"Maybe two facilitators - one more hands on demonstrating and participating."

"In a very similar way - inter school and cross art but perhaps with less on individual practice and more on creative processes and exploring."

"Perhaps more structure and guidelines. Having facilitators might help."

"Safe space to experiment, fail, develop practical confidence."

"They may need a bit more guidance."

"It can be used as part of some subjects that require this type of working progress. Subjects that allow for mutual exchange/sharing between participants."

"Issues of leadership and authorship at this level these dynamics may differ at Under grad level. I think the same model should be used and I trust they will find as much in it as I did."

2.6 Conclusion

The HE LAB made an important and valuable contribution to ArtWorks London in exploring the potential of this environment to support postgraduate students aspiring to work in participatory settings. It is clear that the LAB environment can effectively support the learning of postgraduate students and contribute to the achievement of individual learning objectives. This is engendered through the use of reflective practice as a key component to the LAB content.

The LAB environment proves most effective in the development of postgraduate students by encouraging 'learning by doing' providing space and freedom to explore and develop individual practice. There seemed to be a strong focus on theory in many of the postgraduate students formal pathways, the LAB environment provided a 'necessary' segway into a more practice based experience.

From participants comments it seems that some logistical elements greatly effect the success of the LAB. A huge importance needs to be placed on the facilitator chosen to guide the LAB to ensure that both openness and rigor is employed is the most effective way. Choice

of space is vital to ensure that it successfully supports the activities and provides the right atmosphere for the work being created. A great deal of learning occurred between the students from different artforms and institutions. However this would have been vastly increased if the split between art form and institution had been more equal.

The hugely positive response to this experience is testament to the future potential of this model. We will now look at ways to test the transferability of this LABS model to partner institutions, and any undergraduate and postgraduate courses they run concerned with participatory practice.

Possible areas for further research;

- What is the optimum time scale for a postgraduate LAB. Does a postgraduate LAB *need* to be imersive or intensive?
- How can single art form postgraduate students working with other art forms find a common ground to work from?
- Does the LAB environment evoke new non-verbal ways to address issues related to participatroy practice? Is this the unigie benefit of the LAB environement?

3 APPENDIX: INVITATION



SPECIAL INVITATION TO THE ARTWORKS

LONDON LAB

The Barbican/Guildhall would like to invite you to be part of the ArtWorks LAB, a professional development opportunity for post graduate students interested in working in socially engaged and participatory settings.

DATES

31st March – 03 April

TIME

10:00 – 18:00

LOCATION

Skylight Centre, Highbury and Islington, London

FACILITATOR

Gerri Moriarty

The LAB environment is intended to allow students to experiment, interrogate and explore the creative and artistic seeds of their participatory practice, as well as encourage 'blue sky thinking'.

This Artworks London LAB is a rare and exciting opportunity to investigate and take risks with your artistic practice in collaboration with students from other performing arts disciplines (music, dance, and drama).

The work of the four days will be shaped by your interests and questions and those of others in the group. It will take place in an environment that will encourage reflection and dialogue. Students have been invited from four Higher Education Institutions; Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, Guildhall School, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and Goldsmiths.

BOOKING YOUR PLACE

This is a free learning opportunity, places are limited and allocated on a first come first serve basis. If you would like to take part please send a description of; what your principal objectives are for the four days (we realise that these may change during the course of the LAB) Do these relate to any of the learning objectives of your course and if so, in what way? (Max 300 words). Please send this to Louisa, at the email address below. Please do not hesitate to make contact if you have further questions.

E: louisa.borg-costanzi@barbican.org.uk

T: 0207 382 7345

GERRI MORIARTY BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Gerri Moriarty works as a cultural consultant and community theatre practitioner. She works across professional disciplines and sectors, promoting creative learning and innovative cultural solutions. She devises, writes and directs community theatre and performance. She is a facilitator, an evaluator and a story-teller.

She is currently working with the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, leading the evaluation team for their four year strategic initiative, 'Our Museum', as a critical friend to Blackpool and Wyre's Creative People and Places programme and has recently helped the Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester with a review of its Participation and Learning Programme. She works regularly to support smaller organisations such as Salford Community Arts and Etcetera Theatre Company in Belfast.