

Growing Up Arty

Exploring Children's Experiences in Baycourt Community & Arts Centre

Phase One Research Report

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University of Waikato



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Summary

This project was a collaboration between Tauranga City Council and the University of Waikato to explore the role Tauranga's principal performing arts venue, Baycourt Community & Arts Centre (Baycourt) has played in children's lives. The overall aim of the project is to understand the relationship between Baycourt and young people in Tauranga Moana. The project addresses arts, identity, belonging, inclusion, community, and cultural citizenship in relation to children, Baycourt and the city.

Of the 76 people who responded to a survey, 53 had experienced Baycourt as a child or young person. 13 people took part in either individual or focus group interviews about their childhood experiences in Baycourt. Their memories provide rich insights into the importance of having a city theatre that is accessible for children. The key themes identified are: schools as pathways to Baycourt; feeling a sense of belonging; performance identities; and lasting and transformative childhood experiences.

We end the report by highlighting the importance of Baycourt for children as a place 'of becoming': a performer; adult; and cultural citizen. Overwhelmingly, Baycourt provides a place where positive and transformative relationships and connections are made between children, adults, schools, communities, and the city.

Introduction

The overall aim of this project is to explore the role Tauranga's principal performing arts venue, Baycourt Community & Arts Centre [Baycourt], has played and continues to play in the lives of children in our city.

The project is taking place in two phases. During the first phase we surveyed and interviewed adults about their childhood memories of Baycourt. In phase two we worked with children aged 6-12 years to gain an understanding of their experiences in Baycourt both as performers and audience members. This report focuses on phase one of the research.

We received funding from Tauranga City Council for phase one of the project and from the University of Waikato Strategic Research Fund for phase two.

Background

Baycourt Community & Arts Centre has been Tauranga's principle performing arts venue for more than a generation, serving a dual function as the main venue for visiting artists and productions and as a performance venue for local organisations, both professional and amateur. Now in its 40th year, Baycourt is widely acknowledged as being inadequate to serve the needs of its fast-growing community (Dann, 2021).

Children and young people have had a presence in Baycourt since its opening in 1983. They were, however, conspicuously absent from the city's arts and culture strategy 2018-2021, *Toi Moana* (Creative Bay of Plenty, 2018) and continue to be absent in *Tauranga City Council's Art, Culture and Heritage Action and Investment Plan* (Tauranga City Council, 2023). As Tauranga City Council plans programming for the civic precinct, Te Manawataki ō Te Papa, it is timely to put children and young people centre stage and explore the importance of civic performing arts in their lives.

Research aims

The research aims of phase one of this project are to understand:

- the influence that experiences in Baycourt Community & Arts Centre have had on shaping the lives and performing arts identities of people who grew up in Tauranga;
- how children and young people have connected with Baycourt over the past 40 years; and
- adults' aspirations for children's use of Baycourt and other performing arts spaces in the future.

The arts, identity, belonging, and cultural citizenship

In this research, we draw on the concept of cultural citizenship to understand the relationship between children, young people and Baycourt. Cultural citizenship recognises that, to fully belong in a society, people need to be able to experience cultural belonging, not just political citizenship (Beaman, 2016). The idea of cultural citizenship is enshrined in Article 27 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits” (United Nations, 1948).

A political desire for children and young people to develop as active citizens is expressed in the New Zealand Curriculum, particularly in the principle of Future Focus and the key competency of Participating and Contributing (Ministry of Education, 2007). Supporting children to become active citizens, however, requires an understanding of how children and young people develop citizenship identities (Wood, 2013). Being too young to vote, children are marginalised by the political rights and responsibilities notion of citizenship. Instead, their understandings of what it means to be a citizen are constructed through their experiences of belonging in communities (Wood, 2013).

The performing arts provide opportunities for children and young people to belong in communities, engage in identity work, and explore possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This includes ‘trying-on’ identities and exploring values and relationships. The performing arts, particularly music and dance, facilitate social bonding and group identity (Hallam & Himonides, 2022; Tarr & Dunnbar, 2023), enabling children to experience a strong sense of belonging and community. Arts education and experiences in the arts enable children and young people to participate in the cultural life of their communities, connect with cultural institutions, and engage in social and cultural meaning-making (Kuttner, 2015; Piscitelli, 2020; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Runnel, 2018). These experiences of actively participating in their communities support their development as cultural citizens.

The performing arts need venues. Not only do arts venues provide a space to perform, but through facilitating the coming together of people for a common purpose, they also create opportunities for people to interact and build community (Klinenberg, 2018; Latham & Layton, 2019). This enabling of social interaction and community-building means that arts venues are an important part of the social infrastructure of a city.

Methods

This is a qualitative study exploring lived experiences of Baycourt. In phase one we surveyed and interviewed adults about their memories of how they had experienced Baycourt during their childhood and teenage years. Memories are frequently used as a source of data in the social sciences and are important because they represent constructions of reality or identity

(Mishler, 2004). Remembering is a process of making sense of the past in the context of the present, and of constructing a relationship between the past and the present (Keightley, 2010). Through remembering and relaying their memories, participants construct a narrative about their experiences at Baycourt and the importance and meaning of those experiences to their past selves as children and their present selves as adults.

Participants were recruited through a survey posted on social media (Facebook) and distributed via the Baycourt email list. The survey asked people to sign up to participate in interviews for the study, but also included two long-answer questions: “What was your most memorable experience at Baycourt as a child or teenager?” and “What made this experience special or especially memorable?” Appendix Two has a summary of responses to these questions.

The survey was completed by 76 people, 53 of whom had experienced Baycourt as a child or teenager. Of these, 52 respondents provided a written response to one or both of the long-answer questions.

Following the survey, thirteen people were interviewed about their memories of Baycourt in focus groups or individual interviews. Five of these participants had responded to the survey and eight were recruited through social media posts. Seven of the participants took part in focus group discussions and six were interviewed individually via Zoom. There were 12 female and one male participant, all aged over 26 years old. Ten participants identified as Pākehā/NZ European, one as Māori, and two identified as both Pākehā and Māori.

In this report, participants are referred to by either their first name or a pseudonym depending on their personal choice.

Phase one findings

Survey and interview data were coded and analysed. From our combined data – survey, focus group and individual interviews - we identified four broad themes: schools as pathways to Baycourt; feeling a sense of belonging; performance identities; lasting and transformative childhood experiences.

Overwhelmingly, participants who took part in phase one of this study had both performed and been members of audiences at Baycourt as children or young people. Eleven survey respondents had only experienced Baycourt as members of the audience. Eight of these survey respondents provided written comments, such as:

Heading over to Tauranga to see a show was a big deal for our family. (Survey respondent)

The music, people, ambience, happy atmosphere at Baycourt [made it special]. (Survey respondent)

Forty-three survey respondents had performed at Baycourt. Of these, 17 described their most memorable experience of Baycourt as something that had been facilitated through school, such as school productions, Rockquest, choirs, or school groups taking part in the Tauranga Jazz Festival. Three respondents mentioned visiting Baycourt on a school trip. Other respondents mentioned dance shows, competitions, and youth orchestra performances.

It has stuck with me since and I would say some of the best memories are at Baycourt. (Survey respondent)

We discuss each of the four themes briefly here and will explore them in more depth in future publications.

School as a pathway to Baycourt

But it was always, ...when I think about it, connected with my school. (Chelsea, interview)

All participants who had performed at Baycourt had done so through activities facilitated by their school. Every one of these performers had taken part in a secondary school production at Baycourt, either on stage or in the band.

Playing the piano for musicals being down below the stage for Otumoetai College. (Lisa, interview)

[When I was] at school, Baycourt was a critical part of places where you could perform. So now I've got my three kids living in Tauranga, and they all go to Otumoetai College as well, and so they are also enjoying Baycourt now as a similar part of their life. (Alister, interview)

Some participants compared performing in school halls to performing at Baycourt, noting that the scale and expectations were amplified in the big theatre:

Because of the scale of it! Baycourt seems huge when you're young and it was so exciting to go backstage and into the dressing rooms as a performer. Then watching Les Miserables was like seeing what I had done but scaled up 1000%. It was an incredible show to watch. (Survey respondent)

Other opportunities presented through secondary schools were the Youth Jazz competition in the Tauranga Jazz Festival, Stage Challenge, and Rockquest. Some participants had also experienced performing at Baycourt through primary school activities such as the Primary Schools Music Festival or the junior Rockquest/Bandquest, however most very early experiences were through private dance schools and the performing arts competitions.

From a young age, I think about age 4 or 5 [years old], I danced with Suzanne Hanger School of Dance. We annually had productions at Baycourt theatre. Once a year we would do a dance production, so it would be like every April school

holidays around Easter. (Emma, interview)

All the participants who had performed at Baycourt had done so multiple times. This early entry into Baycourt via schools gave participants a sense of validation as performers, which in some cases had a significant and lasting impact. One participant described feeling 'like you're really doing a professional sort of gig rather than just a school show' (Chelsea, interview). Baycourt helped create children's and young people's sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging

[I was] involved in many dance and theatre productions there [Baycourt]. They were very pivotal in developing my personal growth as a young person and a very important sense of belonging. (Survey respondent)

Participants developed a sense of belonging at Baycourt through time spent in and familiarity with the venue and through working closely with like-minded peers and supportive adults.

Coming from a small, rural school just outside of Tauranga, it was incredibly energising and validating to spend a whole day surrounded by my like-minded peers. The arts were not often a priority at my high school, and it was such a relief to be in a space where they were valued. (Survey respondent)

Because of their multiple points of contact with Baycourt and the amount of time they spent there, many of the participants described 'knowing the place well', even going so far as describing Baycourt as a 'second home' and mentioning the certainty that they would come back every year (for a dance show, the competitions, the Jazz Festival and so on). This implies a strong sense of belonging and some participants described a feeling of ownership.

Looking back, it was a huge part of my childhood, spending a lot of time at Baycourt, and...I think we'd spend like a week there, or definitely a few days, anyway, rehearsing, and you get quite familiar with the place. It was like a bit of a home. (Emma, interview)

It felt like our own place and only we could know it. (Survey respondent)

In one case this sense of ownership had been disrupted for the participant as an adult, causing a degree of bitterness. Debbie noted that when Baycourt changed its strategy to reduce community products to just one third of its schedule, it:

really made things difficult. Because there were a lot of communities that used it and we weren't allowed ... we got pushed out. (Interview)

A sense of belonging is evident when participants mentioned the relationships that formed at Baycourt. For some, this was connecting with the same people at the competitions each

year. For others it was the bonds formed with peers during annual dance school shows and school productions.

[It was] the relationships built through Baycourt, through all the shows I've done there, and all the different things was definitely like, have been very important to me. There's something about the whole singing and performing, and arts and culture, and connecting with people who have similar, you know, interests. And passions, you know, and some really strong, some really strong bonds that you build through that. (Alister, interview)

Our research stirred the memories of two participants who recounted the excitement of having their first kiss at Baycourt:

I had my first kiss between the stage doors! (Survey respondent)

We were teenagers at the time, like the dancers were teenagers ... I had my first kiss at Baycourt! I just remembered! It was ...what show were we doing? It was somewhere like in the Green Room and that weird little room between the Green Room and the backstage. (Rebecca, interview)

Within the performance space of Baycourt, then, teenagers created their own forms of belonging and inclusion. For these young people the sense of attachment to Baycourt is about having meaningful relationships to people such as other children and young people, family, close friends, and members of the performance art community. These examples also draw attention to the importance of time for a sense of belonging, particularly within and across generations. All participants continue to feel strongly about their sense of belonging, many years after first experiences of Baycourt:

To think of all those people that I still, this many years on, have been connected to in some way. It's just so fascinating ... how the arts really do bring people together. (Imogen, interview)

Trying on identities

Performing in Baycourt and working alongside the professional technical team allowed participants to experience or envisage what it might be like to be a professional performer.

Getting the chance to perform in such a big theatre with a very professional team i.e., directors, lighting, sound etc. (Survey respondent)

It just kind of had this layer of glamour to it, that was more than just a school hall, you know, like when you did it at Baycourt, it was a bit more formal, and so it had this feeling of...at least this is what I remember anyway. It's just feeling that there was a bit more excitement involved with being in Baycourt than just your school hall. (Chelsea, interview)

That theatre experience that you get in this bigger venue with a stage and this proper backstage area and dressing rooms. I think that elevates those experiences. (Imogen, interview)

Some participants had also experienced working alongside professional performers in musicals and the ballet.

[My] most memorable would be when the Russian ballet were going to perform The Nutcracker and they approached dance schools around New Zealand, because they needed child dancers, so I was lucky to be selected for that. And yeah, that was quite a special experience, sort of being in a ballet company with people who speak Russian. (Sophie, interview)

Another participant, Taryn who is a teacher, told us about the importance of the formality of Baycourt to inspire young people to try new and sometimes frightening performances:

I had a girl at Fresh Moves last year she was having a panic attack on the side of the stage and she's like 'but my parents are here, I need to go out there' and she did. She came off with the biggest smile, she overcame her fear ... and she's never been like that at school. (Taryn, interview)

Participants were able to 'try on' more mature performing identities than they could in their school hall, where less important performances took place. One participant explained how an experience in Baycourt gave her "the opportunity to ... think all this might be a real thing that I could do with my life." (Chelsea, interview). Another participant wrote:

I had never played and sung before in front of everybody, you know. And so Baycourt provided the platform with which to do so. (Survey respondent)

For some participants, performing at Baycourt was seen as a stepping-stone into a more grown-up world of performing. Friendly Baycourt staff were appreciated during these learning moments:

being allowed to explore the whole space allowed us to really get a true sense of all the different elements needed to bring together to make a production. The friendly staff too! (Survey respondent)

Baycourt also enabled:

blurring the lines of audience and performer, challenging myself, making friends, appreciating the skill of performing. (Survey respondent)

Nine of the thirteen participants interviewed went on to work professionally in the arts either as performers, teachers, or in arts management. Their experiences as young people in Baycourt had a lasting and transformative impact.

Lasting and Transformative Impact

Just having it there as a kind of central part of Tauranga and just how you felt when you performed there, like you [were] doing something meaningful, and you know, contributing. Well, it was pretty, I think, important ... I would go so far as to say it impacted my whole life. (Alister, interview)

All of the participants who performed at Baycourt described aspects of the experience that had had a lasting impact on their lives, due to their childhood Baycourt experiences as being 'such a time of growth'. This included one-off transformational experiences, experiences that contributed to personal growth, and a perceived widening of their horizons.

My first ever show. It was awe inspiring and I vividly remember many emotions about the whole evening. Was an enormous deal to attend (lived rural Katikati). (Survey respondent)

It was my first experience of being in the choir. I was impressed by the theatre, foyer and dressing rooms as it was all very new and felt very architecturally designed. The grand piano on the stage seemed very fancy. We had an after party on the stage which was awesome fun. (Survey respondent)

Performing at Baycourt improved participants' confidence, helped them learn to 'be a good sport', deal with nerves, be courageous, feel joy, and made them more independent. These are qualities that have remained with the participants into their adult lives:

It definitely made me into who I am, and also confidence-wise as well. I'm definitely a more confident person from being on stage and performing. (Emma, interview)

I remember the first pantomime I ever saw was at Baycourt theatre, probably around 1994 or 95. I would have been about 5 years old. I cannot remember what it was about now, but I know that I really enjoyed it! (Survey respondent)

In some cases, one-off transformational experiences determined the participants' choice of career. One participant described such a moment:

A little shift in your brain that can happen when you have the opportunity to push into that new territory of: Oh, my god, I can! I can actually do that. I can actually perform in front of this amount of people rather than my class. (Chelsea, interview)

Many of the participants went on to work in the arts in some capacity and/or continue their involvement in an amateur capacity. Similarly, many participants' childhood memories have influenced the next generation of their families:

Knowing my family were watching me in the audience; the fancy lights; the huge curtain that would come down and the fold down seats. I loved all of it and love that my children are experiencing the same joys. (Survey respondent)

Participants frequently reflected on their own experiences with a view that Baycourt should remain accessible to children and children's performances. It took a change of city for one participant to realise the importance of inclusivity in performance spaces. They remember:

performing on a beautiful big stage and getting to experience the grandiosity of theatre at such a young age. I have since moved to Auckland and go to a lot of theatre there and although there are lots of theatres, the majority are small, and most performers won't get the opportunity to perform in a theatre the size of Baycourt. It's made me realise how lucky we are in Tauranga to have such a beautiful space that is frequently used for all kinds of performance. (Survey respondent)

The lasting impact of the 'magic of the theatre' has stayed with Debbie. She noted that theatres are where experiences can seemingly take place outside of reality and where:

there is no time since you're in the dark and it can be any time of the day ... it's a timeless place (interview).

For children and young people, the 'magic' of Baycourt, then, has created a space of inclusion for children's participation – as audiences and as performers – facilitating lasting and transformative experiences. Children and young people have been able to express complex emotions and experiment with different identities that, for most in this research, have helped them to understand individual and collective hopes, fears, relationships, and to go on to creating positive communities.

Conclusion: Baycourt as a place of becoming

It is clear from the research that for children and young people Baycourt is a place of 'becoming': becoming more than a school pupil; becoming a professional performer; becoming an adult; becoming a valued member of communities; and becoming cultural citizen of Tauranga Moana.

The professionalism of the space, as a technically well-resourced venue with professional staff, was especially important to participants. Baycourt's status as the only professional performing arts venue in Tauranga, meant participants felt their performances would be taken seriously by the community.

Being able to access at Baycourt through school is important from a social justice and equity perspective. Through schools, children and young people for whom private dance or instrumental lessons are not affordable, can achieve equitable access to performing arts

experiences. This highlights the need for the Tauranga City Council to ensure that using Baycourt remains affordable and accessible for schools.

Looking at these themes through a lens of cultural citizenship shows Baycourt forming an important link in a dynamic connection between the individual child/young person and their city. Unlike adults, children need a 'gatekeeper' to access Baycourt. As audience members, children need adults to accompany them. Our participants were taken to events by extended family and whānau and occasionally by other adults, such as their piano teacher. Access to performance opportunities came through schools and other organisations such as private dance schools and the Tauranga Performing Arts Competitions.

Performing at Baycourt provided experiences that were influential and formative on a personal level. The memories the participants shared indicate that their experiences were accompanied by powerful emotions such as excitement, terror, tension, power, fear, and fun. These emotive experiences shaped and reinforced their identities as performers and their sense of belonging both in the physical space of Baycourt and also as part of the performing arts community centred in Baycourt – the community of those who know and use Baycourt.


Through hosting children's performances in a professional space which includes professional technical equipment and staff, marketing, and audience facilities, Baycourt facilitates a connection between the children and young people and the wider community. Baycourt is a city theatre that acts as a conduit between children's everyday sites of cultural participation, such as home, school, the wider community, and the city. By facilitating experiences that expand everyday cultural participation, and through enabling a strong sense of belonging in a public venue, Baycourt acts as a site for the development of cultural citizenship.

Next steps

In phase two of the project, we focus on children's experiences of Baycourt. To do this, we use drawing to elicit conversation with 6- to 12-year-old children about their experiences in Baycourt as audience and/or as performers.

The data from phase two is currently being analysed. We will produce another report in early 2024. This will be accompanied by a public lecture and an exhibition of the children's drawings.


Appendix One



Growing up Arty

How place and identity are shaped by each other

Sharna Steer, Supervised by Bronya Dean and Lynda Johnston
School of Education, University of Waikato, New Zealand



The Project

'Growing up Arty' investigates how place and identities construct each other. Specifically, we look at the nature of young people's experiences at Tauranga's community performing arts centre, Baycourt. This project's goal is to learn how the place shapes identity and to assist Tauranga City Council in their remodelling of Baycourt and the Arts precinct to be more inclusive to all.

Methodology

We surveyed and interviewed adults who had attended Baycourt as a young person. We received 76 responses and have conducted one interview so far. With the survey data, I revealed themes that portrayed the importance of Baycourt as a space of expression and how it helped shape identity.

Themes from data


Belonging
(Stewart Rose & Countryman, 2021)

Emotional Response
(Stewart Rose & Countryman, 2021)

Family Support
(Pitts, 2009)

Sense of Achievement
(Stewart Rose & Countryman, 2021)

Importance of peers
(O'Neill, 2017)



Art by Gian Naballin

Participant Survey Comments

"Sense of achievement playing in a big theatre and dressing up"

"...it was a chance to spend time with a common group of like-minded kids..."

"Knowing my family were watching me in the audience"

"It felt like our own place and only we could know it."

"[I watched] my first ever show. It was awe inspiring..."

Discussion

These themes and responses were important because we gained insight on how Baycourt was able to provide a space where youth were able to express and develop their musical identities.

Conclusion

As this project is still on-going, more evidence will highlight Baycourt's importance in young people's musical lives. With this data, we will be able to advise the Tauranga City Council in how they should transform the arts space to encourage development of musical identities, especially in children.

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Appendix Two

Emotional response	Because of the scale of it- Baycourt seems huge when you're young and it was so exciting to go backstage and into the dressing rooms as a performer. Then watching Les Miserables was like seeing what I had done, but scaled up 1000%. It was an incredible show to watch.	Performing in piano competitions in the XSpace (terrifying but a great experience), and school productions in the main theatre. Or attending visiting dance/theatre companies performances on school trips - always exhilarating and inspiring and a great place to learn how a production works on stage, backstage and on a technical level.	The magic of theatre
Importance of family/relationship building, strengthening	I'm pretty sure my Nana took me to see the Topp Twins here on at least one occasion	Q: What made this experience special? - "My parents"	Knowing my family were watching me in the audience ; the fancy lights; the huge curtain that would come down and the fold down seats. I loved all of it and love that my children are experiencing the same joys.
Importance of peers/relationship building, strengthening	I also danced with Suzanne Hanger and we would do our yearly production. I danced yearly on stage from around 1996-2006 in various productions. Nothing like waiting in the greenroom with friends and waiting in the wings.	I think for all it was blurring the lines of audience and performer, challenging myself, making friends , appreciating the skill of performing.	Performing on a big stage, to a big audience, with my best friend.
Sense of belonging/identity - development	It felt like our own place and only we could know it	Performing in the Hobbit as a 17 year old "Bilbo Baggins great adventure " it was called. Such a time of growth	I was involved in many dance and theatre productions there. They were very pivotal in developing my personal growth as a young person and a very important sense of belonging.
Sense of achievement	Getting the chance to perform a such a big theatre with a very professional team i.e. directors, lighting, sound etc	Sense of achievement playing in a big theatre and dressing up	Being on large stage . Professional set up lighting, sound
Vivid memorable event, something uniquely special	When i was a teenager my friend and I went to a show with Tim Balme about the man who joined his own manhunt after escaping from prison. We were so taken by the performance that at the end we sneaked backstage and ran into the dressing room and screamed at the actors like Beatles fans	I had my first kiss between the stage doors	I didn't enjoy the ballet at all. I kept hoping it would finish but it seemed to go on forever. In the end my friend and I were a bit naughty and were making each other laugh and we told off by a woman we were sitting next to. I remember being so embarrassed.

Emotional response	I remember the first pantomime I ever saw was at Baycourt theatre, probably around 1994 or 95. I would have been about 5 years old. I cannot remember what it was about now, but I know that I really enjoyed it!	My first ever show. It was awe inspiring and I vividly remember many emotions about the whole evening. Was an enormous deal to attend (lived rural Katikati)	Also string memory if the terror of playing violin in music competitions. And very joyful and proud memories of being part of high school musical casts.
Importance of family/relationship building, strengthening	Being backstage as a child, with Mum helping doing makeup and performing on a big stage under lights. Playing in the orchestral pit. Dressing up and attending shows with family.	Sitting in a large audience, seeing music and theatre being performed on stage. In the late 80's early 90's the population of Mount Maunganui was nothing like it is today, so heading over to Tauranga to see a show was a big deal for our Family.	I loved performing at Baycourt! I took part in J-Rock which is the primary school version of Stage Challenge. I participated in J-Rock from years 3-5 in primary school and absolutely loved being able to perform on the big stage and have our whaanau and friends watch our performance!
Importance of peers/relationship building, strengthening	The events were always a lot of fun. I actually enjoyed the rehearsal process even more for a lot of the events as it was a chance to spend time with a common group of like-minded kids . I have very fond memories of those years.	Playing the piano is a huge part of my life. Competing was fun and gave me something to work towards. I learned so much, how to be a good sport, I made friends and enjoyed watching everyone else , especially the older more accomplished pianists who I aspired to be like. Bringing home medals and trophies was a bonus	
Sense of belonging/identity - development	It was like an extension of school and we were always welcome	As a younger person, the opportunity to perform on stage consistently and regularly.	The events were always a lot of fun. I actually enjoyed the rehearsal process even more for a lot of the events as it was a chance to spend time with a common group of like-minded kids . I have very fond memories of those years.
Sense of achievement	I think for all it was blurring the lines of audience and performer, challenging myself, making friends, appreciating the skill of performing.	It was my first performance outside of my school, on a proper stage	Being in the pantomime Cinderella with a professional cast including Mark Hadlow.

Emotional response	Performing on stage and being backstage. Can't beat that feeling of excitement.	The opening was really exciting because Prince Charles and Princess Diana and the crowd was really big.	Seeing the stage show Annie. It was my first ever show experience and I was mesmerised
Sense of belonging/identity - development	Coming from a small, rural school just outside of Tauranga, it was incredibly energising and validating to spend a whole day surrounded by my like-minded peers. The arts were not often a priority at my high school and it was such a relief to be in a space where they were valued.	Playing the piano is a huge part of my life. Competing was fun and gave me something to work towards. I learned so much, how to be a good sport, I made friends and enjoyed watching everyone else, especially the older more accomplished pianists who I aspired to be like. Bringing home medals and trophies was a bonus	
Sense of achievement	Performing on a beautiful big stage and getting to experience the grandiosity of theatre at such a young age.	Coming from a small, rural school just outside of Tauranga, it was incredibly energising and validating to spend a whole day surrounded by my like-minded peers. The arts were not often a priority at my high school and it was such a relief to be in a space where they were valued.	Playing the piano is a huge part of my life. Competing was fun and gave me something to work towards. I learned so much, how to be a good sport, I made friends and enjoyed watching everyone else, especially the older more accomplished pianists who I aspired to be like. Bringing home medals and trophies was a bonus
Vivid memorable event, something uniquely special	One of the dancers playing the 'Turkish delight' I think it was had terrible sunburn and every time her partner picked her up he left big white handprints on her skin on the sunburn.. She must have been in so much in pain!		

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