

# Supporting The National Theatre School's "Theatre Engaging Communities (TEC)" Program

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The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation has a longstanding relationship with supporting the arts in Canada. Creating and staging artistic productions allows artists to express thoughts and feelings not possible in other forums. Audiences engaging with these productions benefit just as much, at once being entertained and faced with thought-provoking issues and questions. The combination of artists and audiences result in important, shared experiences around relevant societal issues.

Since 2005, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation has supported the NTS and its Cultural and Artistic Leadership Program (CALP), assisting over 130 students to carry out productions that cover a range of economic, social and cultural topics. As described by the NTS,

The Cultural and Artistic Leadership Program (CALP) was created in 2005 and ended with a final application process in April 2011. CALP was established to finance innovative projects initiated by students or recent graduates of the NTS. These projects had to combine a quest for artistic excellence with a will to reinforce the social impact of theatre. The CALP endeavoured to encourage the emergence, renewal and recognition of artistic and cultural leadership, with the assumption that this would have an impact in the short, medium and long term – not only on the performing arts, but also on the Canadian cultural scene. After more than 100 funded CALP projects that brought value to communities across Canada and beyond our shores, and in recognition of the milestone year of the NTS' 50th Anniversary, the TEC was designed and private funding secured.

TEC–NTS funding is now established in seven community foundations across Canada in endowments that will continue to grow. Each year, interest will be paid out to the NTS which will, in turn, provide grants to new and emerging artists.

As noted by Tim Brodhead, past President and CEO of the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation — a major donor to TEC, 'The Foundation is delighted to join with others in supporting, in perpetuity and on a national scale, theatrical productions that are social and/or community-driven and created by emerging theatre professionals.' (<http://www.ent-nts.ca/en/school/TEC/>)

## Summary

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In order to get a sense of the pressing issues that students were grappling with during their studies at the NTS, 38 productions supported through the CALP were selected for thematic analysis (Table 1). A full listing of production names are provided in Appendix A.

Table 1. Sampled CALP projects.

YEAR	PROJECTS SAMPLED (LANGUAGES)
2005	5 (4 English; 1 French)
2006	7 (6 English; 1 French)
2007	5 (2 English; 3 French)
2008	6 (3 English; 3 French)
2009	6 (2 English; 4 French)
2010	4(3 English; 1 French)
2011	5 (3 English; 2 French)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>

## Results

### Broad Categories

Based on a thematic analysis, the following eight categories emerged:

Table 2. Themes of 38 funded projects.

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF FUNDED PROJECTS
Humanity	9
Social issues	9
Multiculturalism	7
Overcoming adversity	3
Feminist/feminine perspectives	3
Entertainment	3
Environment	2
Technical	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>

### Category Definitions

The eight categories that emerged from the thematic analysis were defined in the following manner:

**Humanity** — These productions explore fundamental issues that push the resilience of humanity: dealing with conflict, searching for existential answers, facing mortality, and working for freedom.

**Social issues** — These productions address important social issues, such as poverty, injustice, intergenerational exchange, community engagement, child soldiers, and sexuality. For example, “Use my Babies Well (2006)” adapts “the stories of the many brutalized children in Shakespeare's plays into a new work that will examine violence against young people in the modern world.” More recently, “Protestival (2011)” presented six pieces that addressed “the G20, gay marriage, prison systems, child exploitation, workers rights, and poverty.”

**Multiculturalism** — These productions touch upon cultures in their many forms, both familiar and unfamiliar. The first CALP project funded in 2005, entitled “Map of Stolen Ambition” was an innovative exploration of the history and legacy of the conquest of Mexico, focused on opening up dialogue with the past in order to help us understand our present. In “Borealis (2007)”, issues of immigration and integration highlighted how newcomers have to adapt to dominant cultures, addressing issues of diversity and coexistence. “Mondial des cultures (2009)” presented legends from five countries, from Greece, Ukraine, Nunavut, Zimbabwe, and Denmark.

**Overcoming adversity** — These productions present characters who struggle through adversity, and manage to deal with significant life challenges. In “The Heart of a Woman (2005)” issues of death are touched upon when a woman loses her sister and is left alone to deal with the loss. In “Fish Eyes (2006)”, an accomplished teenage Indian dancer is forced to deal with her anxiety about wanting to be a “normal” high school girl.

**Feminist/feminine perspectives** — These productions address issues of feminism/femininity. “K.tel-Va.ri (2005)” was a demonstration of power, weakness, feminine characteristics of what woman was and what it means today, as well as examining and contrasting past rituals with contemporary ones. “EllesXX (2011)”, presented a quest for the feminine identity, exploring a feminine universe in regards to societal stereotypes.

**Entertainment** — These productions kept the spirit of theatre by providing entertainment in different venues. In 2009, “Sortilèges, sorcelleries et autres sornettes” put on shows at campsites, reaching over 900 people. In 2007, “La croisee des chemins” staged a piece aimed at 5-10 year olds about the life of a giant.

**Environment** — These productions focused on the environment. In 2007, “Theatre eco!” focused on the topic of industrial pollution and responsible consumption. In 2008, “The Beekeepers” presented ideas about the role of bees in the ecosystem, and the important of eating locally.

**Technical** — In addition to drama, CALP has helped to fund technical projects, i.e., production pieces. Two examples of this are the “Laboratoire de gravure scénique

(2008)” and “Zone Homa (2010)”, where the former focused on looking at a printing process and how it could be used to stage productions, while the latter set up a space for artistic creations to be developed.

## Impacts

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Based on this sample of 38 funded CALP projects, a variety of impacts related to leadership, community connections, media recognition and awards, as well as overseas success can be highlighted

### Leadership

Many recipients of CALP grants mentioned the opportunities to develop leadership in carrying out productions, to explore new avenues of thinking and feeling, as well as developing myriad technical skills. As one recipient wrote:

I extend my great thanks to the CALP Committee for deeming me a worthy recipient of the creation grant. It has truly served me in the greatest of ways as an independent artist, a solo creator and a creative human. I have had an opportunity to reconnect with and renew my creativity in heart, mind and spirit. I have been revived.

### Community connections

Productions provide an important venue for artists to meet the public, and opportunities for exchanges were very high. With “Map of Stolen Ambition (2005)”, the first CALP funded project, 71 people attended over three showings, with long conversations taking place between audience members and artists. This connection no doubt contributed to the raising of \$7,000 from private donors. In the 2006 production of “The Man with a Wolf in His Belly”, 100 people watched this shadow puppet play over five performances. “Theatre ecolo! (2007)” always followed their performances with audience talks: one performance took place during a public lecture for 150 people involved in environmental issues, and the group was invited to take part in the annual meeting of the *Commission scolaire de Montréal*. “Stolen Child (2005)” led to community development of St. John's by employing local artists, and partnership with the Resource Centre for the Arts to create new theatre.

### Media recognition and awards

Numerous productions have been mentioned in different media outlets, as well as won awards. Some examples include “Nor the Cavaliers who come with us (2006)”, a production that received a Spotlight Award from NOW Magazine for outstanding achievement to an individual or company. “Bliss (2010)” had Steven McCarthy awarded the CanStage award for Best Direction, at the 2010 SummerWorks Festival.

### Overseas success

Over 4 days, “Fish Eyes (2006)” made a profit of approximately \$12,000 during its run in Vancouver. The production was invited to perform in India, Whitehorse, as well as around B.C.

## **Appendix A: Funded Projects in Each of the Eight Categories**

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### **EXPLORING HUMANITY (9):**

- (2005) Every Day Above Ground
- (2006) The Man With a Wolf in his Belly
- (2006) Évidence
- (2006) Antigone: A Clean House for the Dead Season
- (2007) ...And stockings for the ladies
- (2008) Lost ruins
- (2008) Pour en finir avec
- (2008) Rabbit Rabbit
- (2008) KISMET one to one hundred

### **SOCIAL ISSUES (9):**

- (2006) Use my Babies Well
- (2008) Hip-hop Hamlet
- (2009) Du souvenir au rire (Toccate et fugue)
- (2009) Les Contournables
- (2010) Bliss
- (2010) Shed
- (2010) Sia - Production
- (2011) Protestival
- (2011) A Rescue Demonstration

### **MULTICULTURALISM (7):**

- (2005) Map of Stolen Ambition
- (2005) The Stolen Child
- (2006) Nor the Cavaliers who come with us
- (2007) Borealis
- (2009) Mondial des cultures
- (2011) Journées de réflexion sur le théâtre jeune public/Médiation culturelle
- (2011) Origami Airplane

### **OVERCOMING ADVERSITY (3):**

- (2005) The Heart of a Woman
- (2006) Fish Eyes
- (2008) Trois Histoires de mer

### **FEMINIST/FEMININE PERSPECTIVES (3):**

- (2005) K.tel-Va.ri
- (2006) Rosaline

(2011) EllesXX

**ENTERTAINMENT (3):**

(2007) La croisee des chemins

(2007) Theatre sans animaux

(2009) Sortilèges, sorcelleries et autres sornettes

**ENVIRONMENT (2):**

(2006) Theatre Ecolo!

(2008) The Beekeepers

**TECHNICAL (2):**

(2008) Laboratoire de gravure scénique

(2010) Zone Homa