

**A REFLECTION ON THE BENEFITS OF REVITALISING THE TEACHING
CONTENT AND STYLE OF THE RENOWNED MABEL FLETCHER
COSTUME COURSE TO RE-SKILL THE COSTUME MAKING PROFESSION:
AN EARLY STAGE RESEARCH PROJECT**

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ABSTRACT

The paper provides a context to the reasons why there may be benefits in revitalising the original method of teaching costume construction for performance, reporting on reflections from personal experience and a relevant literature review to support the concept. It outlines the research to date and the following research stages.

INTRODUCTION

Within today's industry, it has often been said that courses teaching costume construction are not practical enough to serve this specialist industry and the demise of the Mabel Fletcher costume HND course has influenced the skills of the practitioner entering the workplace. Through a study of the prestigious costume course that began at Mabel Fletcher College, Liverpool, UK, I reveal the reasons for its reputation and possible explanations for its ultimate demise. The result of the research will allow me to question teaching content within today's education institutions to discover whether the standards are compromised, i.e. if the curriculum content and level of teaching is adequate for contemporary theatre. This paper reports on the reflections from personal experience and a review of relevant literature to support the concept before outlining the research to date and the following stages of the research programme. The paper therefore provides a context to the reasons why there may be benefits in revitalising the original method of teaching costume making for theatre productions.

The role of a costume within the theatre is to enhance the belief in the character. As actor and director, Ben Iden (Barton, 1935) points out: "It is not sufficiently realized that costume is not accidental or arbitrary but is founded upon a definite and psychological basis. Costume, in short is the outward and visible sign of the inner spirit which informs any given period and nationality" (p. V). This lack of recognition of the role costume plays in performance is exemplified by the frequent use of the word 'costume' as a "pseudonym for historical dress and fashion" (Barbieri and Pantouvaki, 2016, p.40). Moreover, McNeil states that "Costume studies has battled to claim its non-interactive territory at the borders

of fashion, where it is often conflated with historical dress or fancy dress” (cited in Osmond, 2016, p. 115). Despite these other connotations, this study concerns costume in the sense of garments produced for performance, specifically those worn for theatre productions. The job of the costume maker is to provide a costume fit for performance. The making of costumes must achieve its aims and objectives as an end product i.e. fit, cost, reflection of the design in relation to the figure of the performer, durability for the run of the show. As Ingham (1980) points out: “a good stage costume is designed, planned, and built for beauty, strength, and utility and no single aspect is more important than another” (p166). Most costumes are one off unique garments, produced in a limited space of time. They are the translation of a given design, made to the performer’s individual body shape. In the UK theatre industry, designers and makers are a separate profession and for most stage productions, designers design both set and costume.

Experienced makers have a vast range of skills from historic corsetry and tailoring to contoured garments in contemporary fabrics, abstract animals and tutus. Every show brings about its own challenges and new experiences with many experiments of techniques and with different fabrics. As well as good sewing skills, costume makers need the ability to calculate the complex engineering of historical silhouettes and futuristic designs. Much of the skill of a practised costume cutter and maker is developed through experience and experimentation. For many years Mabel Fletchers Costume Construction course in Liverpool was considered by many to be the premier training Institute for developing the talents of high quality costume makers. To this day alumni refer to their training at ‘Mabels’ regardless of the fact that for many of its ex-students the establishment had been taken over by ‘City College’ by the time they commenced their training. Providing an optional for a preliminary foundation style course, students initially studied for two or three years, until 1992 when, in a bid to progress the course into a degree, all students were required to study for a full three years. The course was started by costume practitioner David Harvey Jones whose legacy was to produce a course that developed intensive training in all aspects of performance costume construction. Students were presented with a design to interpret and make to the measurements of a model, unlike other courses in which time was spent on developing design skills. Although equipment was basic, the tutors were highly skilled professionals from the industry who understood its requirements and techniques. Students worked on construction skills within the college all day, five days a week and were taught in groups of around fifteen. A placement of around four weeks was arranged by the college and gave the students quality industry experience and contacts.

As a lecturer in costume construction I frequently liaise with wardrobe departments around the country. Industry professionals often complain that there is a desperate skills shortage and that the industry is struggling to find staff with enough basic knowledge to enter the profession as an assistant without extra in-house training and instruction. Although there are now far more educational establishments offering costume training, most are degree level courses that incorporate design and academic skills as a major part of the course. Attainment at this academic level and the restrictions on the teaching within a university establishment mean that the practical aspects of the course are limited. Teaching practical subjects is expensive, it is far more economical to teach 100 students in a lecture theatre than to demonstrate to a small group in a workshop. The staff to student ratio is far higher

than in the Mabel Fletchers days which greatly affects the content as well as the contact time with students. As one lecturer pointed out, she now teaches pattern drafting as opposed to cutting on the stand as it is more feasible for the classes of up to 60 students that she is required to teach. It can be argued that students on today's courses are offered a far rounder educational experience, and unlike the qualification gained at Mabel Fletcher's, students attain a degree level of transferrable skills that open up a vast range of career opportunities outside of the costume profession. With limited theatre salaries and the cost of courses now levied on the student in the UK, the degree status providing the ability to progress into other more lucrative career paths, has a greater attraction than ever before.

Aim

The aim of this paper is to highlight the critical questions relating to the training of techniques used in costume construction and context and to detail the research to date and planned future research.

A BACKGROUND OF COSTUME CONSTRUCTION

In her manifesto *In Defence of Craft*, Monks (2014) points out that:

The work of designing, making and wearing costume that goes on backstage in the rehearsal room, the wardrobe and the dressing room, remains mysterious, often unacknowledged, and given far less status by critics and scholars than the work of actors, writers, directors and sometimes scenographers on stage (p175).

Part of this lack of visibility is, she argues because "Costumes don't tend to be produced by authors... No, costumes tend to be produced by craft-workers: skilful and collective groups, not singular virtuosi. And as such they are often lost from sight to scholarship" (Monks, 2014, p. 175-176). This is backed up by Isaac (2017) who found research into historical theatre costume challenging as 'Dialogues between designers, makers, wearers and, indeed, directors (or their historical equivalents) are rarely documented, with the result that the careers and lives of costume makers represents a notable absence from existing research within theatre history,' (Isaac 2017, p.122). To this end, this section starts with an exposition of the roles and relationships in a theatre wardrobe department, followed by a review of the key debates on standards and authenticity in stage costume construction.

As Pollatsek (2012, p5) points out, "Theatre design is a uniquely collaborative art, and the artisans who implement the design are an important part of the process, through their creative problem solving and the nuances they add visually". Most British rep theatres have a production wardrobe department, whose job it is to create costumes for each show. A typical basic wardrobe department will consist of a head of wardrobe (sometimes also the supervisor), a cutter, a wardrobe assistant and a costume maintenance assistant. Dressers, who help actors put on complex costumes and undertake quick changes during the running of the show, will be brought in for shows as required. Most designers are freelance, working for different theatres around the country. They will work with the

director in developing the concept for the production and produce designs accordingly. Meeting with the costume supervisor prior to the start of the make period they will talk through design ideas and decide what is to be made, used from stock or hired. The Supervisor can then start to put together what is historically known as the 'Costume bible.'

The making of costumes, or 'make period,' generally coincides with the start of rehearsals. This is usually the first time that the wardrobe team can meet the performers and take measurements. Time allowing, the designer will shop for the fabrics, haberdashery and accessories with the supervisor. Meanwhile the cutter will interpret the design silhouette to produce pattern pieces to create the costume to the performer's measurements. Patterns are cut either on the stand (tailors dummy) or by drafting out on paper. The wardrobe assistant will sew together costumes ready of the first fitting. As renowned costume cutter and maker, Jean Hunnisett (1988) points out: "I always use an assistant who will be involved in making costume, as this not only gives them a sense of identity with the artist but also provides them with experience of watching a fitter work." (p8). Hunnisett considers it important to have a connection between the maker and the performer (artist).

As fabrics arrive more costumes will be cut and made up and gradually each costume will be fitted on the performer by the cutter. These fittings usually have both the designer and supervisor present so that they can discuss the interpretation of the design on the body and any accessories required. Any alterations required will be pinned in place, to be marked up on return to the workroom. The costume will be passed on to the costume maker for completion, or in some instances ready for a second fitting. When all the garments have been cut and fitted, the cutter will help the rest of the workroom in finishing off the costumes. Some costumes may then be broken down to add a back story or enhance its personality.

A usual make period is around five weeks, ending in what is known as 'Tech week.' Tech week is a time when the show is slowly run through from beginning to end so that all the technical elements of the production can be plotted and are tested together e.g. set, lights and costume. During these rehearsals, quick changes are organised and trialled and performers become aware of the physical capabilities within the costume. The supervisor and designer make notes of any costume modifications required. Notes and costumes are sent back to the workroom, so the staff can carry out these alterations. This is also a time when designer and director may decide to cut a costume from the show (remove it) or decide extra costumes are required. This can be due to extra characters being added or scenes being removed.

Tech week ends with a full-dress rehearsal. The aim being to do a complete run of the show from start to finish in real time. If needs be a dress rehearsal is stopped to correct any issues. Following the dress rehearsal, costumes are either returned to dressing rooms in readiness for the next show or returned to the wardrobe department for alterations and maintenance. The timings of shows in rep theatre often means the wardrobe department will be working on more than one show at any one given time. It is common for freelance supervisors, cutters and makers to be brought into the workroom to cover the busy periods but only a skeleton staff will remain during the summer when many theatres 'go dark' (stop producing shows for the summer).

With the movement of freelance workers around the various producing houses, a costume maker's reputation will travel around the country. Many makers become known for expertise in specific areas e.g. Tutus, tailoring, prop costume. Supervisors will allocate costumes to makers depending on their ability. The cutter can greatly affect the translation of a character, through the styling of a design into a garment on the performer's body. In reflection of their training experience and talent there are many ways in which a costume maker will interpret the same design. The interplay between designer and maker is illustrated by Pollatsek (2016) who points out that: "Technicians often credit the designers sketch with inspiring a new technique, and designers were quick to mention how a wonderful draper or crafts artisan had breathed life into an idea they were not completely sure how to bring to the stage" (p xiv). Motley (1964) also stress "it is a very important part of the designers work to get on good terms with the cutter, so they can be a real collaboration". However, Barton (1950) cautions that "Too often the designer's conception suffers changes from sketch to stage that not merely falsify his creation but hampers the interpretation of the play by director and actors" (p49.).

Historical Accuracy and Authenticity

A considerable amount of performance costume is based around historical interpretation, for this reason construction techniques are founded from historical costume and much of the teaching on the Mabel Fletcher's course developed these skills. Janet Arnold's (1973) *Handbook of Costume* argues that "The history of costume in all its aspects is essential for technical staff as well as for amateur and professional designers to produce good period costumes for theatre" (p.7). For example, like a lot of period dresses, costumes are backed with a base fabric to give strength and longevity. Costumes are rarely lined unless they are to be removed on stage or in the case of tailored garments, the lining aids the movement of the wearer. This being the case, unlike fashion items the inside of costumes displays the marks of the maker, denoting seam lines and alterations. When creating historical costumes, a cutter will refer to various reference material to create as accurate a reproduction as possible and unless instructed otherwise by the designer, a cutter will endeavour to produce the perfect fit for every costume.

Pioneers of historical dress reproduction Nora Waugh, Nancy Bradfield and Janet Arnold produced publications that have been an important research resource for the professional costume industry for many years. These books give diagrams of existing original period clothing. Although there is limited making instructions in any of them, they give clear guidelines as to the cut and styling of historical garments. Written in the 50s and 60s Norah Waugh's books display a variety of scaled down patterns taken from original garments found in museums. Although Waugh gives a detailed description of the garments there are no making instructions and one requires a level of experience to create patterns for a modern figure. Nancy Bradfield's (1968) *Costume in detail* provides detailed annotated diagrams of original garments and accessories providing invaluable information for historians and costume makers alike. Similarly, the highly acclaimed series of books *Patterns for fashion* by Janet Arnold (1964, 1972,1985), gives detailed information on patterns of original garments.

Over the last 20 years there has been an increase in the production of literature providing in-depth information in relation to reconstructing historical costume (Tiramani & North 2011; Gnagy,2014; Harris,1999; Salen,2008; Doyle,1997). The rise in popularity of American Renaissance fairs, re-enactment societies and the sub-culture Steam Punk has potentially added to the interest in such publications. The emphasis on these books is to use historical techniques to develop a true copy of the original garment. Although these books are extremely useful as a reference tool, the methods used are not always relevant for performance costume or for the modern performance costume maker. Fastenings can be problematic and time-consuming, shapes are not always appropriate for the modern figure and can be too restrictive for performance and materials are not always available or appropriate for laundering. This is supported by Mary Kidd (1996), who acknowledges the importance of the costume as a working garment in her book *Stage Costume: Recreating historical costume exactly is neither necessary nor desirable*. The costumer must try to produce costumes which appear authentic on stage, but which are also adaptable, hard wearing and practical to wear quick changes and ease of movement must be accommodated. (Kidd, 1996, p.6)

In contrast, costume designer Jenny Tiramani is adamant that historical accuracy is “vitaly important” when producing stage costumes and believes that finances should be made available to produce accurate handstitched period costume, using handwoven fabrics and employing high level craftsmen (Personal communication, September 21, 2017). Tiramani, Director of theatre design at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre between 1997 and 2005, carried out extensive research into costume worn for the original Shakespearean plays. She went to great lengths to undertake original techniques in the re-creation of historically accurate Shakespearean costume for the Globe’s 2002 production of *Twelfth night*. Costumes were made from natural fibres evident of the 16th century, including some specially commissioned fabrics to accurately replicate authentic garments. Ruffs were hand starched and shaped with hot pokers.

Theatre design group Motley (1964) discuss the importance of using primary research for historical costume and producing an effective period silhouette and claim that “authenticity is essential” (p76). However, their approach is somewhat different to that of Tirimani, and it is the effect created that is paramount to Motley:

A Motley production of *Hamlet* simulated brocades by painting one of the cheapest of all available materials, scenery canvass. The critics approved, and the production did represent our genuine feeling of revolt against the trite and the hackneyed in period stage work. (Motely, 1964, p40)

A number of other authors also detail the ‘tricks’ they use to produce costumes quickly and on budget. Lucy Barton (1935) has some advice for choosing fabrics for stage costumes for the Elizabethan period: “in the material sold for bathrobe you can sometimes find heavy figured flannelette (which gives, under lights, a rich effect like cut velvet) and a good Terry Cloth” (Barton 1935, p232). Tina Bicat (2006) shows a comparable approach to costume making in her *Handbook of stage costume*, where she goes as far as to suggest that that bum rolls can be made from an old pair of tights stuffed with wadding and a 17th century gentleman’s coat can be made by using a pattern for a nightshirt or pyjama jacket and breeches can be made by cutting the bottom off modern day trousers. This is a

complete contrast to the attention accuracy shown by advocates of historical accuracy such as Tirimani and Arnold and the standard of make instructed by Hunnisett. Interestingly, both Tirimani and Bicat are educators of future costume makers and their very different approaches will inform future professional costumiers and the standards they deem acceptable within the industry.

Bicat does acknowledge the different standards of work from different companies and in relation to her own costume construction techniques: “None of the techniques is the only or the right way of doing it – they are just suggestions and ways that experience has shown to be quick” (Bicat 2006, P82). Speed is an important factor for costume practitioners in the industry and for some is prioritised over authenticity. In a chapter on Early Gothic Costume, Barton writes “Better not try to cut tights with fitted seams..... I think what you gain in authenticity you lose in time and probably discomfort.” (Barton, 1935.p149). However, in *The Costume Technician’s Handbook*, Rosemary Ingham (1980) has a different point of view:

You technicians have to construct garments that withstand the rigours of the play, even when the costume is made out of silk chiffon and must appear to be a fragile bit of nothing. You can simulate fragility on stage, but you must avoid actual fragility. Sturdy, functional costume construction results from always using the best cutting and stitching techniques available to you. Costume technicians often employ shortcuts and speed sewing techniques but careless and shoddy stitching waste time and have no place in good costume construction. (p166)

One aspect of costume construction that seems to epitomise the debate over authenticity is the varying attitudes to fastenings in period costume. Michael Holt, author of *Costume and Make-up* (1988) describes: “Nothing destroys the authentic look of a costume more quickly than an inappropriate line of hooks and bars or, worse still a zip” (p60). Motley (1964) concurs and states: “We strongly advise against the use of the ordinary useful zip in period costume, unless some means can be found for making the audience believe that authentic fastenings of the day have been employed” (p16). Interestingly, they are not rejecting the use of non-authentic fastenings but acknowledge the need to conceal the use of modern day techniques to sustain the audience’s belief in the period portrayed. However, other authors see nothing wrong with finishing a period bodice with a back zip and a seemingly unauthentic four-piece doublet collar (Huang, Hoem and Hunt, 2014: 194).

Pride of the Maker

Motley (1964) describe the ideal costume as being one that “Looks well, fits well, wears well, and above all, seeks to clearly delineate the character which the actor portrays.” (p73). Although rarely credited outside of the show program, costume makers generally have a great passion and pride for their work. However, none of the literature examined for this review has discussed the views of costume makers regarding successful or exemplary costumes. This may have a historical dimension, as in early theatre productions actors provided their own costumes, and the role of the costume designer did not become apparent until the late 1800s, when stage costume makers started to be credited on

programs and companies specialising in costume construction started to emerge (Birkett, Dorney & Haill, 2016). Despite the credits on programmes, show reviews are often notable for their lack of comment on costume and if costume is mentioned at all it is at the designer who is commended, rather than the talent of the construction team. This particularly evoked a reaction from founding member of CITA (Costume in Theatre Association) Catherine Kodicek, in relation to a review in The Stage of West Yorkshire Playhouse's production 'Strictly Ballroom'. Kodicek (2018) posted on CITA's Facebook page "How is it possible to review this show without ever mentioning the costumes!?!?! The mind boggles." For many productions this lack of notability can be seen as a positive, as costume is not there to take centre stage and should not speak out unless a specific requirement of the performance. Jean Hunnisett (1986) concurs and points out that:

If the costumes become intrusive they have failed. The artist should first of all be comfortable and unaware of the clothes they are wearing. This in turn, makes the audience believe the characters they play and, together with the set, lighting and sound completes the magic theatre or film. (p8).

PERSONAL REFLECTION OF PRACTICES

Having been involved with theatre since a young child and showing a talent for creativity and a passion for sewing, I naturally advanced into a career in costume construction. Studying on the highly acclaimed Mable Fletcher course (then based at City College, Liverpool), I developed a high standard of costume construction. Having now worked within the costume industry for over 30 years I have extensive experience of the profession. I have made costumes for a variety of professional theatres as a freelance maker and in-house cutter and wardrobe assistant. As a wardrobe mistress I have overseen the maintenance and use of costumes for two national tours. The later part of my career has been in education. I have worked in three different higher education establishments, teaching students the making and use of costume. As a lecturer I must evaluate levels of achievement and the quality of a range of costume construction techniques on a weekly basis. Through this varied career I have developed a comprehensive and valuable insight into the teaching, production and workings of Theatre Costume and the attitudes and associations people have with them. Ethnographic research is defined by experience and participation within the environment and forms the grounds on which this research is built.

Early in my career, I was captivated by the passion of the makers and their relentless striving for quality results. Having then progressed into different areas of the industry I encountered the views of people who had a different perception and understanding of costume. Having seen how wrecked costumes are at the end of a long running show, I have questioned if the high quality of the initial product is really appreciated or necessary. This has led me to question and re-evaluate the craft and its acknowledgment within the wider theatre community. I have been led to consider whether the passion for the craft is merely the makers need for achievement, to fulfil their own personal gratification and satisfaction or is a necessity of the industry. Has this always been the case? Did the values indoctrinated into me through my training exist early in the industry?

Initial Discussion with Industry Experts

My role as an educator has enabled discussion with various industry experts, which has provided a background to the study and a basis on which to build further discussion. All professionals approached were enthusiastic about the research and keen to express their opinions. I will consider doing a series of in-depth interviews with industry professionals as my main research method

Archives

In a bid to see the techniques and quality of costume of years gone by, I have undertaken several visits to the Victoria and Albert archive, in London, to study a selection of costumes dating from mid-18th Century to 1969. These included costumes from designers David Walker, Alex Stone, Oliver Messel, Leon Bakst and Charles Wilhelm different interpretations of Queen Elizabeth 1st costumes (see Figures 1-6). I found that the V&A house Oliver Messel's original designs for a Glyndebourne Festival Opera's 1955 production of Mozart's opera "Le Nozze di Figaro" for which David Harvey Jones produced the some of the costumes. Although there are records of the designer, shows and performers it is extremely rare to find any indication of the makers involved and as such it is not possible to tell if any of the costumes viewed were made by Harvey Jones. I found the levels of quality of the construction extremely wide ranging. I was enamoured by the hours of work in the Ballet Russes costume from 'L'Oiseau d'or' covered in exquisite hand embroidery, the true quality of which was only evident on close inspection. (Figures 1-2). In contrast, I was confused at the reverence given to those that used cheap fabrics, metal zips, Christmas decorations and plastic mouldings crudely glued into place. Was this a reflection of the maker's ability and aspirations, the expectation of the designer or the effect of limited time and budget? These costumes are viewed as historical artefacts, some documented with their original design and performance information, but the story of their make is unheard and, as yet, appears to be unconsidered. I realised that archives were not going to provide the information about the makers and their training.

Education

In my present role as a lecturer in costume construction, I decide not only what techniques are taught to students but also the levels of expectation to assess the results of their work. This has led me to question the levels of quality within costume construction and to carry out preliminary research into the background of costume construction courses. At the 'Costume and Fashion in Context and Practice' symposium at The University of Huddersfield, UK, I presented and exhibited some of my previous research into the use of 'Second Skin' a pattern cutting technique for costume. As a member of the 'Costume and Pedagogical Practices' I discussed the use of the 'Second Skin' technique as a teaching aid to enhance the understanding of pattern cutting to costume students. This gave a valuable

opportunity to discuss teaching techniques with lecturers from other establishments. Similarly attending the Costume Society's study day, Reconstruction-Theory and Practice, at Nottingham University, UK. Attendance enabled dialogue with reconstruction experts about the value they held for the use of authentic materials and techniques in the reconstruction of period costume for performance. Discussions with educators presenting new text books for reconstruction costume for stage, revolved around the issues of teaching traditional techniques to larger groups of students. With many of the attendees being from theatre workrooms, I could also gain their reactions to some of the intricate reconstruction methods being presented.

Destinations Exhibition, London.2017

The *Destinations* exhibition is the only event where costumes, tutors and students from specialist costume courses from around the UK gathered together at one time. Exhibiting costumes from students I have taught on the Costume with Textiles Course, will establish my role within the exhibiting community. Through this networking opportunity, I liaised with delegates from all different levels of the establishments exhibiting their work, as well as industry experts attending the exhibition. With over 24 education institutions exhibiting, I was able to view a wide range of costume design and construction examples from the 2017 cohort of UK students (Figures 7 & 8).

FUTURE RESEARCH

History of Mabel Fletcher Costume Course, Liverpool

I will carry out an in-depth history of the Mabel Fletcher costume construction course and the course leader David Harvey Jones. I will investigate how successful the course was in terms of fulfilling an industry requirement for good quality makers and providing career skills. Through this I hope to discover the issues associated with the course, the many changes it encountered, and the reasons for its closure.

Interviews

Interviews with past students from different years of the Mabel Fletchers course, will give a background to the learning that took place on the course, the teaching styles adopted and the contact time with staff. Did they feel the training was over excessive and if they still utilise the same techniques? I aim to gain a clearer understanding of its reputation, determine the changes that took place and the reasons why it is held in such fond admiration. I will question how well their training prepared them for the industry and how confident they felt in their ability to undertake professional costume making early on in their employment and consider how successfully the course prepared them for a lifelong career.

Conversations with lecturers from the course will further explain the ethos of its teaching, the issues they encountered and the reasons for its closure. I hope to gain a background to David Harvey Jones and an insight into why and how the course was started in Liverpool.

I will conduct further semi structured interviews with a range of industry professionals to determine, what they feel are the requirements of a junior costume assistant, the techniques and level of experience they require for their workroom. I hope to discover if there really is such a skills gap and if there are courses they feel are working effectively to produce staff appropriately skilled for the workroom. By talking to recent graduates from a range of courses I aim to discover how confident they feel about their work and levels of attainment in all areas of their course and, how they feel about their training in relation to their chosen career paths.

Through meeting with lecturers from a range of course teaching costume construction I will enquire about the different challenges they face and how they strive to overcome them. I will also enquire as to the allium of the courses and the career paths they have chosen.

CONCLUSION

Having over 30 years' experience within costume construction, I have a wealth of personal experience to draw up on. Ethnographic research is defined by experience and participation within the environment and forms the grounds on which this research is built. As a lecturer in costume construction I am immersed in costume construction pedagogy . Reflection and reaction on the techniques taught and explored by students will act as a consistent feed for this research. The knowledge I have gained throughout my career, will enable me to communicate effectively with a range of costume professionals and effectively gain information required to evaluate research. The outcome of this study will be to produce a true understanding of the effectiveness of costume construction at different levels and the training needs of the costume industry. The result will generate a documented, oral history of the costume maker, their education and their relationship to their art and a deeper appreciation of the craftsmanship involved. Exploration of the qualities and requirement of theatre costume will inevitably affect my teaching practice and journeying through the enquires with industry experts, will have implications and influence within theatre industry.

As well as providing a history and account of the costume course at Mabel Fletcher's College, the research will give an overview of today's teaching in costume construction and discover whether the skills gap highlighted by industry professionals reflects the current education system.

In this paper I have introduced the reader to the research concept and provided an overview of different values and standards in costume construction, to substantiate the concept of the benefits of revitalising the Mabel Fletcher teaching style and course content to reskill the costume industry.

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Figure 1: Ballet Russes costume from 'L'Oiseau d'or', Ballet Russe, 1909, V&A Archive, London (Garland,2016)



Figure 2: A close up of hand stitched embroidery, V&A Archive, London (Garland,2016)



Figure 3: Detail of decoration from David Walkers, The Duke of York as Victory Costume, V&A Archive, London (Garland,2016)



Figure 4: Miss matched decoration. David Walkers, The Duke of York as Victory Costume, V&A Archive, London (Garland,2016)



Figure 5: Elizabeth 1st costume adorned with Christmas decorations, V&A Archive, London (Garland,2016)



Figure 6: Sleeve decoration using gunking, V&A Archive London (Garland,2016)



Figure 7: Destinations exhibition.
(Garland,2017)



Figure 8: Destinations exhibition.
(Garland,2017)