

**Report on evaluation developed with  
Highly Sprung for  
*First Steps: A pilot Physical Fellowship for Primary aged pupils***

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## 1. The brief

The evaluation sought to enable Highly Sprung to develop ways in which to investigate and evidence the effectiveness of the *First Steps* Physical Fellowship model (see below). In particular it focused on how physical theatre

- can engage children as
  - o a live art form ( a kinaesthetic aesthetic)
  - o a way of understanding and learning about a range of curriculum based topics and issues
  - o a communicative medium for developing and expressing ideas

The evaluation also attended to the project's ambition to also

- provide valuable artist training, promoting practice based learning to support this and future project delivery
- to improve future models of this work, through testing models of documentation and evaluation of the process.

*First Steps* was a pilot, involving 150 primary aged children (8-11 year olds) who had limited prior experience of live arts. It drew upon a developed and tested model of Physical Fellowship for Secondary aged young people with two particular adaptations for the primary context. Whilst the secondary model is typically situated as a drama or performing arts project and is supported by a specialist teacher, the primary model connects with a teacher who teaches across the curriculum. Arts-rich, creative pedagogical approaches to learning invited teachers to locate the project within curriculum based content from any discipline as well as developing agreed learning skills. *First Steps* also offered a cultural education stimulus by bringing children in direct contact a range of different cultural artefacts and art forms housed in local cultural contexts. The body and physical theatre remained the constant medium for processing both their own ideas and making personal sense of others'.

The elements involved

- o a half day planning for learning and evaluation with artists
- o a half day day project introduction and planning with teachers
- o an inspiration day (at Transport Museum or Herbert Museum and Art Gallery)
- o 6 workshop sessions in school led by a Highly Sprung artist to devise an original performance using physical theatre, developed from Inspiration day, connected to a curriculum areas, chosen from options offered by Highly Sprung
- o Performing at Warwick Arts Centre
- o Seeing *Up, Up and Away* as an exemplar of professional physical theatre
- o Reflecting on learning throughout the process, at and after the final event

## 2. Evaluation design

The approach to evaluation focused upon sustainable, bespoke and embedded data collection processes which might become woven into company practice. Ease of use was a key factor for adoption by busy, self-employed artists whose working practice is physical and experiential.

Highly Sprung recognised significantly different needs of artists: from young artists, new to working in schools to older more established practitioners. For some developing an attunement to educational contexts and learning how to develop partnerships with teachers were crucial. In most if not all cases developing reflective habits required support and were precursors to any community of practice.

In early meetings it was agreed to identify one common and one locally selected evaluation priority for each artist-teacher partnership and to test several methods of data collection in combination.

*Engagement* per se was identified as underpinning all other possible desirable outcomes. Artists felt that they recognised different levels of engagement and were able collectively to identify and negotiate commonly agreed descriptors for that at the planning meeting, on a 5-point scale. Several ways of reviewing this were agreed.

- Firstly a **line drawing / graph** based review for the journey of a whole session (day or half day) for the class's level of engagement (using the agreed scale of 1-5 on the vertical axis) which proposed four particular points of review reflecting the four stages of a session identified by Highly Sprung of warm up, introduction to activity, activity, application of activity (on the horizontal axis) [Appendix 1]. These were completed separately but simultaneously by artist and teacher immediately after each session and then, alongside a second method formed the basis of a brief reflective discussion.
- Secondly six children were selected as focus children – a sample of the range of learning 'types' in the class. Teachers were invited to identify a mix of genders to include two children who typically accessed learning fairly easily, two for whom accessing learning was more varied and two who found it more challenging. No account of reasons was required. These were selected were reviewed after the first session with the artist and occasionally edited by mutual agreement. Using the same criteria separately but simultaneously artist and teacher immediately after each session noted a bar chart type **level** for each child.
- Thirdly in the final minutes of each session **children were invited to self review their engagement**, to the same criteria. Using their stickered name label, they placed their sticker on or between the numbers 1 and 5. So although all 'soft' data about perceptions, this combination allowed a triangulation to occur and most importantly a focus for discussion about when and how practice was affecting learning and learning behaviour. This reflection time was written into artists contracts.

In addition to this *artists were invited to identify a question they might like to investigate about their practice in school* – which might relate either to learning, to self expression and communication or to physical theatre as an art form. These were drafted at the artists planning session and then reviewed and on occasion refined / altered following discussion with the class teacher. A **wiki** site was established and artists invited to share their question and also blog their own and teacher reflections in relation to this focus.

Finally to enable parents to gain an insight into the aims and character of the project an installation was developed with children at the final sharing event. Teachers sent a key photo in advance to be printed and quotations from evaluations by teachers and artists were also printed out. On the day of their performance, on postcards children were asked to say what connections they had seen between their pieces and the performance they saw of *Up, Up and Away*, as well as what appealed to them about it. They also talked to the theatre designer on the show about their work and wrote the ideas they wanted their parents and other adults to know about what they had been learning and doing through the project. These ideas formed a final piece of reflection about the project enabling parents to understand more of what was involved and adults involved to hear what had mattered to the children.

An analysis of these sources follows in the next section.

Artists saw the value of investigating and evidencing the impact of their work. Most had immediate ideas of what they would like to explore and following the meeting with teachers were able to identify an area of personal interest to reflect upon throughout the project. A number of these related to learning, asking whether

- working physically can aid memory
- doing physical theatre improves enjoyment and in turn enjoyment helps learning
- the freedom of self expression which physical theatre fosters can have a positive impact on the growth of a child's confidence
- a physical approach to collaborative work can feed and inspire the value of and respect for difference
- a focus on collaboration using physical theatre can foster the growth of children's individual strengths

### **3. Impacts for young people**

#### **i. Engagement (and learning)**

As detailed above, **engagement levels** were recorded by children, teachers and artists on a 5 point likert scale using a locally defined set of descriptors (see Appendix 1 and 2).

During project sessions, teachers at all five schools noted **improvements in engagement of at least one full level on typical engagement**. At two schools, where class teachers who typically rated engagement levels as 4 rated engagement levels of 5 on the project. The other schools either selected or as cohorts had more socio-economically disadvantaged children. In one school the deputy head was involved and through witnessing changes in children became a huge advocate for the project. She saw shifts from a typical 3 to 4.3 in the project. With a similarly disadvantaged group in another school a typical engagement level of 2 became 3 on the project. And in the last a typical 3.4 was recorded at 4.6 during the project. Comments like the following were made of the teachers:

- *'Pupils' levels of engagement were high throughout. They were focused on their learning at all times'.*
- *'During the project the children were fully engaged throughout the lessons and engaged in their learning'.*
- *'99% of the children are very engaged and working hard'*

Children's self evaluations echoed this – with most identifying themselves as very engaged.

Within such a broad view about engagement, there were numerous **more dramatic changes in engagement reported for individual children**. For example, in the most challenging context, the most disengaged child moved from 1.5 to 3.5 over the course of the project, and in another, within one session one child improved from 2.5 to 5. Often teachers annotated their marks with comments about exceptional engagement such as

- *'Children were so focused - it was a joy to see!'*
- *'Never seen W like that before – so focused!'*
- *'S, L and Sa completely involved themselves whereas they would normally drift off'*
- *'Best I've seen L'*
- *'Our serious SEN child got so much out of today. She smiled so much'*
- *'C is really coming out of his shell. He's putting in 110%'*

Comments on the wiki, at visits and in the final evaluation session from teachers also revealed a sense that improvements in engagement levels were also characterised by a greater **consistency of engagement** evident in **more self controlled behaviour** and less variance between focused and unfocused behaviour.

## ii. **Self-belief and interpersonal learning behaviours**

The connecting theme of the project 'Dare to be Different' appealed to a number of the teachers, with either the implied emphasis of self-belief or broader skills such as cooperation, teamwork, concentration, persistence and risk-taking being rated as the most important priority of the project by all the teachers on evaluation forms.

Alongside engagement, impacts on personal and interpersonal behaviour were the most frequently commented on by teachers and artists.

In addition to *'developing their self confidence'*, teachers spoke of the process of working physically helping children to be

- *'responsive to each other'.*
- *'They're more willing to work with children they wouldn't normally choose to interact with,'*
- *'they don't want to let the team down'*
- *'they just got on today and collaborated – they were amazing'*
- *'they were proud of what they had created as a team.'*
- *'Children's self-esteem and awareness of themselves as part of the group developed markedly during the project.'*

Often this was a marked shift from being *'shy, reserved and wary to begin with'* to *'confidence levels rising rapidly'*. One teacher talked at the evaluation session of the importance of risk-taking in learning, of children *'being out of their comfort zones at times'* because *'their social and personal development increased rapidly as a result'*. The sentiment was echoed by other teachers.

The children's own reflections echoed recognition of the value of learning to work together – with more than half of children identifying this as an important thing they were learning.

- *'We have learnt about collaborating with different people'*
- *'I've learnt how to make colossal movements and work together.'*
- *'I think collaborating is better than working on my own'*
- *'When we work together it is really fun because we have lots of ideas.'*

In one school the values of tolerance were explored as children learnt about the Mayan tribe living in the rainforest. By enacting the Mayan way of life, children began to empathise and see a relationship between behaviours in the Western developed world and the rainforest. As one child said *'Almost everything we do effects what happens all over the world'*.

There were numerous stories of individuals who felt the process changed how they saw and felt about themselves, boosting confidence and increasing self belief. A sense of fun, complete enjoyment of and absorption in the physical mode, infused with the expectations related to performing to others in a professional venue were combined in many comments where children reflected on what the project had been about for themselves, such as *'I have had an opportunity to perform and show people who I really am.'* The head teacher from one school sent on a piece of work done at home with the rider *'X is not usually the type of girl who produces any work at home and has been disengaged and in quite a lot of trouble over the last few terms'*.

The child concerned had written

*'On Tuesday we are going to perform in a theatre. I am very nervous. I hope I don't get a move wrong. I am just going to focus and concentrate. I just want to go for it instead of hiding in the corner all the time'.*

### iii. Learning about .... curriculum topics

Improved self-belief also fed children's interest in and retention of learning related to **curriculum topics** agreed between school and artist as the context or stimulus for devising workshops and performance piece. Children and teachers reported high levels of interest in the topics they studied and were aware of the significance of physical practices in developing their learning skills, stimulating fascination with the knowledge they learnt and their understanding of the associated issues. As many commented

- *'They seem to remember everything that was taught during the sessions.'*
- *'They were focused on their learning at all times.'*
- *'The variety of approaches and activities kept the whole class stimulated in a purposeful learning environment.'*

Children learning about the Romans, easily rolled off facts about how Roman roads were built, how Roman armies trained and fought as they demonstrated and explained through actions. They demonstrated a **real fascination with knowledge and its significance** - which they were able to tell the evaluators on the performance day and feed into further learning about the Romans in the following term. They told us that

- *A volcano called Mount Vesuvius had erupted and killed off all the people perfectly preserving their bodies in ash for hundreds of years.*
- *Romans were very good at building roads. They built 9000km of road.*
- *Romans built straight roads. If they had twists in them the enemy might be behind them*
- *Roman roads were so well made that they can still be seen today*
- *Romans practised fighting with wooden poles and hay bales.*
- *They could march 20 miles (40km) a day wearing full armour*
- *Soldiers had to stay in the army for at least 25 years*
- *They trained with a little sword called the Gladius which was twice their weight to gain strength for battle. Some Romans had a red spike going over their helmet like a Mohawk to show they were a commander of a sergeant. They always held shields with left arms and fought with right arms.*

A bronze into stone age topic provided the context for children to take on the imagined roles of cave painters, Bronze/stone age people, to honour the gods, to imagine meeting and learning about the Amesbury Archer – experiences which were repeatedly mentioned in evaluations. As in the Roamns project, the teacher noted that *'Children remember information learnt and this is reflected in their written work'*.

Certainly over two-thirds of children's evaluation spoke of what they had learnt, often also how and why this mattered to them:

- *'My favourite part was learning about the Amesbury Archer- he was the king of Stonehenge. Also I liked learning about weapons and the ferocious animal.'*
- *'We found a skeleton and learnt who it was...'*
- *'We learnt about logs as wheels ... I know that they used logs because we acted it out'*



In another school children studying rainforests gained an understanding of a different civilization, values and way of life through a focus on the Mayan tribe who live in the rainforest. Within sessions, children's questions and reflections revealed new insights being developed. The teacher noted moments of children's fascination with such learning and particularly a typically disengaged child who *'asked amazing questions to reinforce her learning. It was amazing to see her enthusiastic about the topic'. 'They loved the factual side and it meaning something to them'*. The teacher and children thought physically enacting was a great way of exploring, thinking and learning about the topic. A sample of children's comments confirm this:

- *We thought about rainforests and how people are chopping down trees.*
- *We made a rainforest with our bodies*
- *We made news programs together about rainforests our time and Mayan time.*
- *We have learnt through using our bodies ... about rainforests*

#### iv. Thinking with the body

The significance of **thinking with their bodies**, of how physical theatre provided an imagined but also experiential learning, was central to the project. All involved, teachers, artists and children alike, recognised the quality of learning happening as a result of working and expressing in a physical and aesthetic form.

- *'The biggest impact on the children in my class was the opportunity to express themselves in ways that they can't normally in class. Especially for those that find academia difficult. They were able to bring stories alive without writing and this gave them a sense of achievement'*
- *'I felt that the session ran most harmoniously and was most energised when the children were on their feet, putting thoughts/ideas into movement.*

Interestingly in very different schools with different artists two children reflected almost identically that they had

- *'learnt how to speak with my body more than with my mouth.'*
- *'learnt to communicate without using my mouth'*

Others that

- *'I like that we can move our bodies into different shapes instead of writing, drawing or talking about our ideas'.*
- *'There is no one telling you what to do or who is the leader, you just connect.'*
- *'We learnt well because we were moving our bodies – learning just sitting down is just boring.'*
- *'We have learnt through using our bodies ... It's about connecting our imaginations'.*
- *'I like that you can move in the space.'*
- *'I think movement is a different way of learning.'*
- *'You have to stay concentrated all the time in movement.'*

- *'Doing movement helps memory but its also fun and when things are fun they're more interesting so we learn more because we listen more.'*

Observations of sessions consistently revealed that by drawing attention to aspects of physicality, artists heightened children's focus and attention. This was realized in different ways at different times by different artists but with a similar affect. In one instance reminding children of a previous exercise or game caused children to physically, in miniature, replay and thereby recall the body memory of the idea. In another an artists' quiet voice directed attention to the presence of the body so that an idea modeled by the artist was attended to more. Often, simultaneous modeling and talking about the qualities of movement by the artist allowed the heightened skill of the artist as performer to communicate and inspire children. Artists' joy and passion for physicality as an expressive communication form was also infectious. The skill of the artist in selectively combining and dramatising stillness, eye contact, non-verbal signals and voice quality in their own practice was significant here.

Additionally the culture of working in an open space appeared to normalise a range of physical learning behaviours. The differences of children who naturally fidget, who like having space around them, children who process ideas through physical action, who enjoy using the floor were all accommodated and acceptable. Space and physicality generated a awareness of the power of non-verbal forms to communicate well. Artist's echoed

- *When making our Roman weapons as props for the performance, we started thinking about how heavy they would have been and how this might effect our movement when performing the army training. Having the 'weapons' in their hands really helped them understand how the romans defended themselves.*
- *When asked to express something physically, through image and improvisation, the group worked in harmony, connecting their ideas with ease.*
- *When they were involved in acting out cave painting and describing what they were drawing, they were freely working together with complete focus, no argument.*
- *The children were able to recall the physical activity that they had participated in and remember information even from the start of the project in great detail.*
- *The shorter the time the group have to create something the easier they communicate ideas. Less talking and more physical work = happier, more focused children and more enjoyment'*

The process of choreography also indirectly taught collaboration, mentioned above (see 3ii). With the focus upon the movement work, the individual's role in relation to each other was clearer: artists and children spoke of listening, concentrating, watching and turn-taking as things they were learning through the process.

## v. Developing cultural learning

High level of fascination was evident across all schools about the artefacts, environments and ideas they encountered and explored on the day at The Herbert and Transport Museum. For most this was a first experience and a number were nervous before the day, but being invited to **respond actively through physical theatre** and to **investigate and wonder** together about those who had 'dared to be different' appeared to have overcome any difficulties and generated significant levels of interest and fascination. Children's responses, written and sketched on large rolls of paper, indicated high interest / fascination in the experience. Children commented repeatedly on the aspects below as likes (or sometimes as dislikes)

- *unbelievable stuffed animals*
- *the shiny room*
- *that a woman pretended to be a man ( George Elliot)*
- *fastest car in the world*
- *bloodhound*
- *bond car*
- *penny farthing*
- *designing a card with gadgets*

Two comments summed the impression given by all schools:

- *'It was so SO SO interesting with all the facts.'*
- *'The trip was so good that I would like to come again.'*

Similar responses were received to the performance day at the Arts Centre which some teachers had been concerned might involve behavioural challenge as children waited to do individual technical and dress rehearsals. They were all delighted to discover that the carousel of planned activities engaged the children fully. They were involved in meeting the designer for *Up, Up and Away*, creating materials for a project display to give parents and audience members an insight into their process, rehearsing with their artist, learning how to perform on a large stage to unspoken technical cues.

Witnessing the performance of *Up, Up and Away* was a significant focus for the project's aims of combining cultural and other educational purposes. In reflecting on how the performance connected with their own pieces, every child was able to identify a link. Some comments related to seeing particular physical moves which they also used, and many also generated personal connections, but overwhelmingly they reflected recognition that physical theatre communicates ideas and their work belongs to the body of physical theatre practice – an art form.

- *'When sky girl rolls over Joe. That's exactly like when we roll over each other to pretend to be wheels and stones!'*
- *'They worked together in a team like us. The battle between Joe and sock thief is the same as Celts and Romans.'*
- *'You were telling a story with your body without using any words, like us.'*
- *'Sky girl and Joe even though they were different they worked together, like in our section we came together to work as a team to help each other.'*

- *'I think that when Joe was being bullied its like our islanders saying get off our island.'*
- *'The performance we saw yesterday they did a tabletop like ours.'*
- *'We had a scared pose and Sky Girl did a scared pose when the evil people came on.'*
- *'In Joe's story in parts of the performance people froze and ... we had to freeze like in Joe's story.'*
- *'I think the whole story was Joe and Sky Girl's imagination while they were reading a book. This links with our story because we're using our imagination to tell our story.'*
- *'Sky Girl as well as Joe dared to be different and so did the Romans.'*

## 4. Positioning the project in school

### i. Curriculum

Artists were committed to developing learning about curriculum topics as well as learning skills and personal / interpersonal development through the devising of performance work. This was clear in contracts, in training sessions but also in the behaviours within the project and responses of artists at evaluation.

However in most schools the strongest rationale for taking the project appeared to relate to the 'dare to be different' theme: to develop children's self belief and broader learning skills. Overall teachers saw the role of the project in terms of delivering curriculum content as less significant than skill development. It was clear from the first planning session with teachers and in evaluative discussions with teachers and head teachers throughout and after the project that the potential to simultaneously address curriculum content was not fully recognised by schools. Indeed one head teacher suggested that a different conversation would be needed with curriculum leads to position the project in this way. A second deputy head felt that they had missed the opportunity to maximise this potential, which they now recognised and would be keen to ensure a second time. Overall teachers appeared not to expect significant curriculum content to be addressed – as if this might detract from the project's other dimensions, the potential for developing personal learning skills and overall experience.

Perhaps the current educational context – with new subject based curriculum requirements and increased accountability on progress being introduced was a factor. Teachers wanted children to experience the joy of an arts-based project freed from such expectations. Whilst understandable, such expectations ignores the significant body of work on arts based learning – for example the recent Creative Partnerships Initiative which positioned artists and teachers in partnership as creative pedagogues. Certainly the current and altered political landscape presents challenges for artists working in schools to negotiate the development of arts process-based learning practices, but

this project has this very potential. Several teachers said at the final evaluation that they now understood how curriculum could also be addressed alongside other objectives and how valuable this was for the children to know they were learning physically as well as growing in other ways and experiencing the process of making a performance. However they did not know or understand this potential before the project began. One said *that she now understood that*

*'Using physical theatre can enhance learning and motivate children'.*

Another suggested that a

*'If there had been a previous study, or research that we could have read to understand the impacts it can have that would have been useful. I do feel I learnt a lot through the process though and so now I am more informed.'*

## **ii. Cultural education**

The project was highly successful in being seen as and valued as an initiation in cultural education: an insight into Coventry's city based cultural heritage through physical theatre. The focus of performing at the Butterworth Hall in the Arts Centre was significant to the project's appeal to teachers.

Children were encouraged to respond, typically with movement through *'carefully planned activities'* (teacher) to what they saw when visiting the Herbert and Transport Museum (for example echoing shapes of a sculpture). This approach and also inviting children to see artefacts as evidence of people who had *'dared to be different'* appeared to have generated accessible hooks for children to engage and wonder about what they encountered. As one child said *'Mary Ann Evans dared to be different, she almost changed the world'*.

Teachers recognised the skill of artists in facilitating and supporting children's engagement with each of the three city cultural venues involved: noting that

*'Pupils were given time to reflect, look, ponder, use their bodies to express themselves. They could be creative, work individually, in pairs, groups, with an artist, supported or independently. There was plenty for visual ... and kinaesthetic learners.'*

Indeed the deputy head teacher at one school had surveyed the parents of the children involved and was able to report that *'The impact of working in these cultural spaces inspired 16 out of 30 children to return with their families during the Easter holidays thus suggesting that the project has had a positive impact not only on the pupils involved in this project but on their wider families too.'*

## **iii. Teacher - Artist partnership**

Limited attention was given to the significant partnership between teacher and artist – indeed to the very perception of themselves as partners on the project. Although challenging to prioritise, this is an area worthy of further attention by Highly Sprung as a company. In some instances personalities clicked and a

bond was created, in others extant relationships fostered an assumed understanding, in many, expectations, roles and ways of relating remained underdeveloped.

Clarity about the multiple and potential purposes of the project was an issue in many relationships – as discussed above, particularly in relation to expectations about the positioning of the project in the curriculum. In the most successful partnership, acknowledged, pre-agreed curriculum *and* learning behaviour purposes informed the teacher-artist partnership from the outset. These were valued by and interested both artist and teacher and this formed the basis for a growing mutual respect between teacher and artist. This was a strength of the project in relation to achieving its multiple objectives and was unique to one of the five projects. By comparison in another instance a teacher indirectly communicated a concern about '*the amount of time the project took from curriculum time*', revealing a resolvable tension of the project being positioned as outside rather than, as intended, as part of curriculum based learning.

An additional factor was the inexperience of artists and teachers in their own educational arts/ educational practice. Two of the artists were very new to school projects and two teachers were beginning teachers still involved in training. Significant imbalance of experience was also a factor in several cases (a newly training teacher working with an older more experienced artist and an established senior teacher working with an artist new to school based practice). In all instances this suggested that clarity of roles and expectations as well as of project purposes required attention to limit the potential of either partner wittingly or unwittingly fostering a purely responsive mode in the other.

More time to build relationships, recognise assets, agree expectations and roles might support careful matching of teacher and artist.

## **5. Reviewing the evaluation model**

### **iii. Tools and processes**

A final review of the evaluation processes and tools revealed a high value for the proforma (appendix 1) as a user friendly, quick tool. This was rated as 4.5/5 by teachers and artists. Its real value lay in triggering the habit of and an immediate focus for post session dialogue between teacher and artist about the session and its impact upon learners. The design to select a sample of 6 children to focus upon (in addition to reviewing overall impact of the session at various stages) was especially valued by teachers as a manageable and insightful way of recognising and articulating impact whilst reflecting. Almost all teachers mentioned how they valued this either during visits or project evaluation. This emphasised the limited opportunity as well as supportive frames teachers have to constructively observe and learn about the children

they teach and that there is potential for more co-learning between artists and teachers.

One more experienced artist felt differently about the proforma, although not about the importance of post session joint reflection. For him the tool was more suited to less experienced practitioners and free dialogue a preferred process. Interestingly in this partnership, with an inexperienced teacher partner, the process of independent scoring as a precursor to dialogue was not observed and all notation was done together. The potential value of exploration of difference was thereby unknown.

Some further attention is needed to the language of evaluation. Although negotiated together at the artists planning session, the term 'engagement', its definition and the significance of levels was articulated different across artists and even within one session. The term focus was often used instead of engaged and some teachers reflected that this might have been an easier term for children to understand, whilst recognising that there are connotations of fascination and interest that might be missed with this. Indeed one teacher asked children to suggest what they thought being really engaged might look like. Responses used the term focus but one child seemed to capture peers thoughts when he said that it was 'when you are really on it, there, .. on fire!' During visits, artists invited children to reflect on their levels of engagement, explaining it variously as

- 'how well I did'
- how well I concentrated'
- 'how involved I was'
- 'how focused I was'
- 'how much I enjoyed it'

This variance challenges the veracity of data gathered. Additionally levels were not consistently described as agreed (see appendix 2). Particularly the significance of level 3 as being satisfactory with either a positive ('fine') or negative ('ok, but..') connotation varied between practitioner which had a knock on effect in many contexts of children self evaluating higher than the original descriptors suggested.

The wiki-site, intended as a test site to be used primarily by artists was used as a reflective tool with some regularity by three of the five artists. In several cases questions were posed and debated, more typically thoughts were reported, both about impact and also reflections on practice and what might be adjusted. For example

- *We looked at facts about Mount Vesuvius and used drama to create Pompeii before and after eruption, making a dance of the lava travelling down the volcano. Every so often I would ask how high or wide the volcano was to keep important information in their head, and the children always remembered the information.*
- *Looking at my question I do feel that Physical theatre helped them remember information and what happened.*
- *A note for myself when come to giving them information I need to keep*

*them moving and not sitting down for too long as some the children did switch off. 28 Feb 2015*

- *The session was inspired by 'The Island' - a man arriving on the an island whom is different to it's inhabitants and therefore excluded and mistreated. The children expressed sadness at the story when physically creating it in the Woosh activity and also expressed such feelings verbally in agreement with one another in a discussion. I asked them how they would finish the story and change it in any way that they like. Most suggested for the man to leave the island with a friend on his raft/go on adventures by being rescued by an eagle (which was a favourite idea of the day)...most of them created images of the man leaving on his raft with one other character. None of them suggested that the people on the Island could adapt and maybe accept this man and learn something from him. I tried to hint at this idea verbally. I did get an interesting response that the man could go to another island and be accepted there. I wonder if I could have helped them reflect even more so, maybe non verbally? 12 March 2015*

Questions and comments on each others entries were rare and typically made by the external evaluator. e.g.

- *What is required of you / planning / context to ensure the conditions for children to be safe, listened to, supported?*
- *Ensuring time for children to share ideas, with each other, with the group and with me. Reminding children what good listening looks like and how positive it is to listen and be listened to. Ensuring equality, everyone's contribution is met with positivity and equal value. Instructions are given clearly and repeated. I often use children to help model the results I expect to see, so everyone is working in context where they are aware what the outcome might look like, and have been given the tools/skills to be able to create outcomes to creative activities that draw on their own ideas within this context. Ensuring that there are different ways for children to respond that do not always rely on verbal communications- Lots of creating shapes in silence, responding to the shapes of others without negotiations... Embedding these processes as positive approaches to working creatively and ensuring the children have the understanding and physical experience to do this in groups and individually. Presenting a positive approach where every idea is met with praise before criticism and suggestions for development are well directed.*

The two artists who did not engage fully with the wiki site cited time and context as factors. For one the inability to negotiate an agreed enquiry question was the core limitation, for another this was bureaucracy rather than a reflective and learning process. Certainly the idea of the wiki as a medium for developing a community of practice requires more attention, to be positioned as core to the development of practitioners and the project as a whole.



## **i. An enquiry question focus**

The construction an enquiry question was new to all partners and generally received very positively. Most reported that this was a thought-provoking focus which directed purposeful conversation. For those partnerships where this was underdeveloped, evaluation revealed a sense of a missed opportunity and a desire to ensure that this was part of their practice next time. Nonetheless this was vulnerable to the clarity of the projects' multiple objectives and the teacher-artist partnership. Where the artist had drafted their own enquiry question before meeting the artists and this chimed with the teacher partner's interest and / or was openly discussed as a joint focus at outset, the shared engagement in exploring this focus was underdeveloped. Although achieved in different ways, three of the five partnerships achieved this. In one the question was pursued but owned by the artist. In another no focus was agreed although reflection did happen.

Overall the attention upon an enquiry question was significant and valued. However, to become more valuable attention should be given to the mechanisms for communicating the purpose and process of such an approach and its relationship to wider company ambitions to develop a reflective community of practice as part of artist (and teacher) professional development.

## **6. Thoughts and possible next steps**

Overall the *First Steps* project was a highly successful pilot project, valued by all partners and in most instances achieving or exceeding expectations of partners. The project design encompasses varied and complex ambitions that both communication and evaluation processes can support.

The evaluation of the project heightened the attention of all stakeholders to the value of the project: design, practices and impacts. It also tested sustainable embeddable processes which have real potential to support Highly Sprung in leading excellent physical theatre based cultural and wider learning opportunities for young people and in growing a team of committed artists skilled in this field.

To conclude I suggest some thoughts and recommendations which may warrant particular attention and inform company's next steps.

- Review literature to schools and to artists to improve clarity of communication about the multiple key priorities of the project. The use of extant relationships with schools and artists could allow this to be tested before the next year's launch of First Steps.
- When negotiating with schools making links with curriculum leads as well as head teachers, especially where made in the previous year or

terms, can support recognition of the project as a means for curriculum learning and thereby profile this dimension as integral to the project. The use of quotations from this years project and testimonials, word of mouth will also help this.

- Explore means to profile the success of this pilot and communicate with new audiences.
  - i. For example a platform within Coventry's termly primary head teachers meeting, which could be negotiated via Kim Docking would also be a way to ensure this – and with pilot partners' support could ensure that the multiple objectives of the project are profiled and understood to include curriculum objectives.
- Future contracts for artists should include expectation of evaluation time and that each has some precise expectation e.g. pre-project planning with partners, negotiating development/learning focus, 15 minutes talk time with teacher/partner re. agreed focus after each session; 15 minutes write-up (on HS bespoke proforma / project online site / about or of session re. agreed project focus)

As a company Highly Sprung may also wish to consider as a company the value, in relation to longer-term developments of

- How to involve schools further. Two possibilities discussed to date include
  - i. Developing professional development for teachers as a dimension of the project, so that teachers can better support beyond and within company led sessions and so that they are more experientially attuned to the projects multiple aims. This might include collective training but also less company intensive investment such as pre-planning for staff to shadow sessions and practice approaches with other groups.
  - ii. Expanding the schools' engagement in attending *Up Up and Away*. Teacher suggested different roles e.g. as reporters / writers on different aspects: the story, the characters, the set and props...
- Developing bespoke processes for future projects to establish an expectation of embedded and artist / artist-teacher reflections about practice.
- Exploring publication and media profile for your practice in cultural and curriculum education
- Exploring funding opportunities plans for professional development of artists (and artists with teachers) both as an extant focus and within new projects.
  - i. This might include time for Highly sprung to analyse and reflect on current practice, as a prologue for a growth plan,

for example, from this project one aspect which might be further analysed is company practice in delivering multiple objectives. Highly Sprung might ask artists for copies of their session plans and review for patterns / characteristics and how they relate to the imagined blueprint / your own process for the project. What 'core principles', 'suggested elements', 'alternative / possible ways of working' be useful in recognising and positioning artists current assets, developing young artists and, clarifying expectations with more experienced artists and achieving such multiple objectives in varied and challenging contexts.

- ii. Future development of a community of practice through sessions might mix face to face, partnership with schools / educators and virtual platforms and involve the coordination of a body of practice focused upon embodied, creative and cultural learning.
- Exploring funding opportunities, in partnership with others, to research and evidence further the impact of physical theatre on children's learning and development (abstract and cognitive thinking links; health and well-being)

# THE PHYSICAL FELLOWSHIP First Steps...

## DARE TO BE different Evaluation

**Name:**

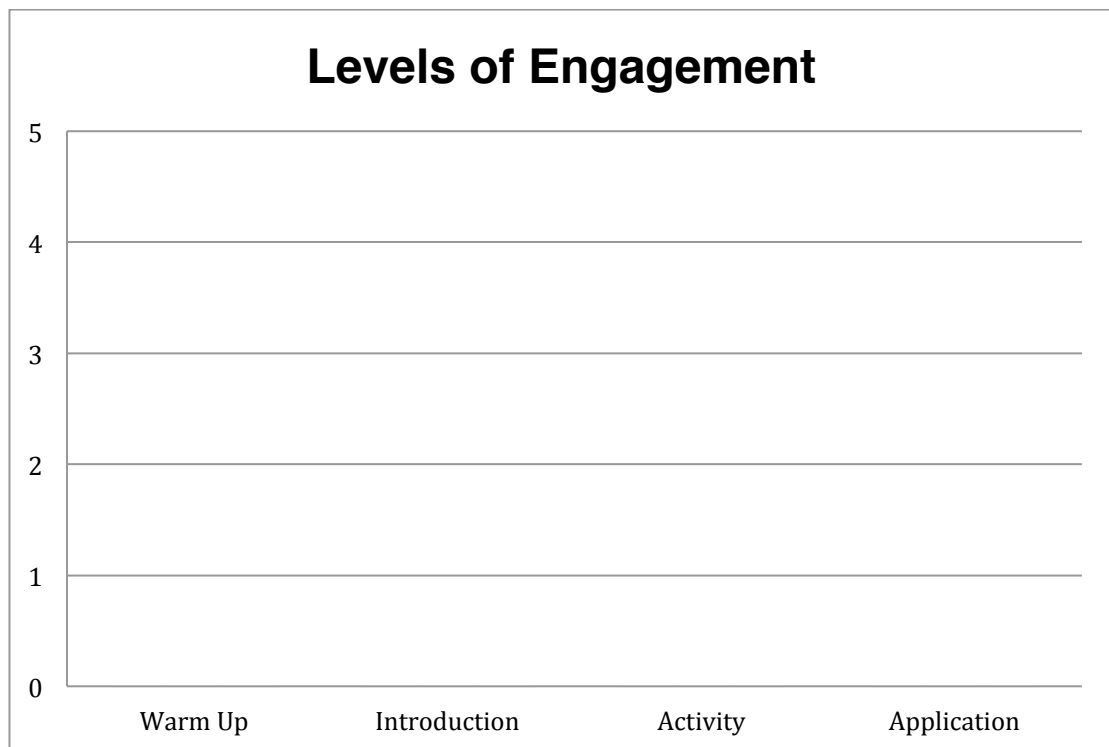
**School:**

**Session Number:**

**Evaluation seeks to test whether children:**

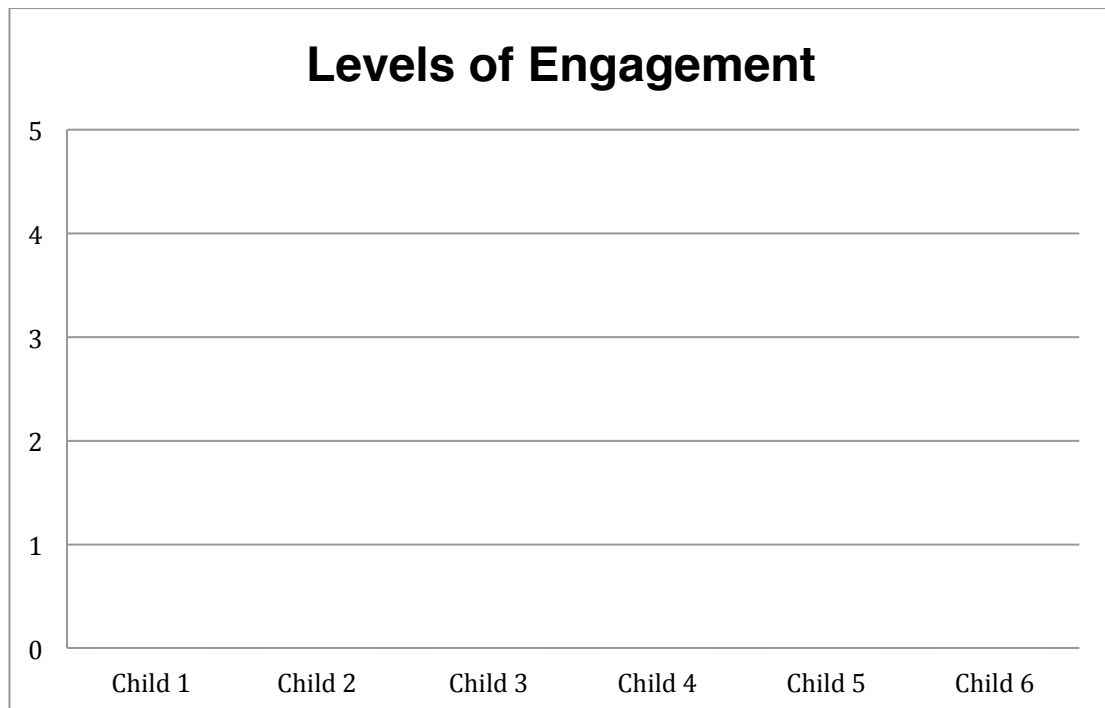
- find physical theatre appealing
- are engaged by the embodied experience of physical theatre as
  - a way of learning
  - a way of making and communicating (ideas and feelings)
  - as enjoyable for other reasons

**Class Engagement Chart:**



**What conditions or actions appeared significant at points when engagement level changed?**

**Focus Children Engagement Scale:**



**Comment on your area of focus:**

- Creating and Communicating
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Learning and Understanding
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Enjoying and Appreciating

**Any Additional comments on levels of engagement:**

## APPENDIX 2: Levels of engagement descriptors

<b>5 Outstanding</b>	Hands up, all enthusiastic, all smiling. No-one chatting, no distractions. Some independent enquiry to extend. A maturity of thinking and practice.
<b>4 Very Good</b>	Everyone on task, everyone engaged in idea, but typically not going further into independent enquiry. Occasional fluctuations.
<b>3 Good</b>	Majority engaged and understanding (acting their age). Playful and moments of maturity: listening and responding. Leader is able to push most of class
<b>2 OK</b>	All listening most of the time but occasional breakouts. Doing but feels functional, some getting it. Progress held back by the unengaged/lively (could just be a handful)
<b>1 Not OK</b>	Some following, some off task/into it. Leader needs to repeat task, and to individual groups. Leader always struggling, often fire fighting – even when majority on task.
<b>0</b>	Not listening, running off, individually focused. Talking groups, off task. Leader having to raise voice to be heard.

## APPENDIX 3: Wiki site entries examples

### Clifford Bridge – Ben Morley

**Artist/teacher research question:** Does doing something physical help you remember something better in your head?

#### Artist

- *Children were given imagined text excerpts from eye witnesses at the volcanic eruption at Pompeii and asked to create a series of images / movements (to show reactions). All groups really focused on the key words. Two of the groups decided to also speak the text as they performed, which added to the communication of the ideas.*
- *When making our Roman weapons as props for the performance, we started thinking about how heavy they would have been and how this might effect our movement when performing the army training. Having the 'weapons' in their hands really helped them understand how the Romans defended themselves.*
- *The group work on making war machines through physical theatre showed how much they had learnt. They were transferring information into their own work but also making their own creative developments.*
- *I set the task to show how the Romans built their roads – and to show this using the physical 'contact' movements they have learnt. All groups showed real understanding of how the roads were built in great detail.*

### Earlsdon – Lucy Smee

**Artist/teacher research question:** How can a physical approach to collaborative work feed, inspire and respect the value of difference?

#### Artist

- *Working in pairs (but not with friends) each pair asked each other 5 questions about why they are different to or the same as others. Individually they 'translated' their own answers into gestures, shared them with their partner and then created a sequence of these gestures to create a movement piece. Everybody gave 100%. They worked freely with their ideas and the energy was buzzing when they were putting ideas into physical actions... it seemed a great example of negotiation as they worked out physically which of their gestures would work together and why.*
- *There seemed to be a more harmonious atmosphere, not one group struggled in their communication - physical or verbal. There was a strong sense of unity within every single activity.*
- *When asked to express something physically, through image and improvisation, the group worked in harmony, connecting their ideas with ease.*

#### Children

- *I like that we can move our body into different shapes instead of writing, drawing or talking about my ideas.*
- *Using your body ... there is no one telling you what to do or no leader. You*

just connect.

- I like that we can move in the space

### **Frank Whittle – Mark Anderson, Infusedance**

**Artist/teacher research question: How can Physical Theatre develop children's communication skills with each other to promote good teamwork? How does a focus on collaboration using physical theatre foster the growth of children's strengths?**

#### **Artist**

- *Pupils are concentrating on each other, watching ready for their turn.*
- *I am able to push them further as they are more focussed, less distracted by each other's behaviour*
- They are more willing to work with people they normally wouldn't interact with.

#### **Teacher**

- Some children who are not usually particularly outspoken or confident are more vocal, for example volunteering to lead a group
- They don't want to be the one that let's the team down
- The encouragement and respect they give to each other ... is how the bonds between them are being strengthened

#### **Children**

- It's fun but hard at the same time.
- Some things are easy but doing things together can be quite hard.
- I'm more confident than at the start

### **Walsgrave – Mark and Sarah Worth**

**Artist/teacher research question: How might the freedom of self expression through physical theatre have a positive impact on the growth of a child's confidence?**

- *Children expressed themselves more confidently and with more creative thought, when their ideas were being listened to and supported by others. We saw this when they were involved in acting out cave painting and describing what they were drawing. They were freely working together to animate their drawings, with complete focus, no argument.*
- *We also saw confident thoughtful engagement when exploring the discovery of the Amesbury Archer. There was complete focus, then really excited questioning about who he was, what his story was, working together to investigate and use imaginations to complete the missing stories.*
- *The children were able to recall the physical activity that they had participated in and remember information even from the start of the project in great detail.*



#### Teacher

- *Their communication and team work are showing development and I can see evidence of this in the general curriculum.*
- *During one of the activities which required the children to visualize, closing their eyes and using their imaginations a child who is quite shy, lay with her eyes closed, on the floor and described the scene she saw in front of her in great detail and then a huge grin came over her face. It was magic!*
- *Children have particularly loved the story telling and have been totally engaged and inspired by this activity. The tasks that followed were up-beat and full of enthusiasm from the children.*