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POLYGLOT @ FURLONG PARK

An evaluation of the Extended School Residency program at Furlong Park School for Deaf Children, July-December 2009

Victoria Stead and James Oliver
Commissioned by Polyglot Theatre
April 2010
The school bells goes at 9am and the older group gather in the large multi-purpose hall. First things first, and it’s everybody up and in a circle. The warming up is quick as Sue leads the impro games — jumping and shaking out legs and arms, wiggling bottoms, hurling hands away from bodies as if to send them flying across the hall. Everyone writes their name in the air with their hands, then their noses, their elbows and their tongues. Then Sue calls out and signs, “now write your name with your bottom!” Immediately — as if some unspoken line has been crossed — the children pause, step back, and shoot each other looks of incredulity from the corners of their eyes. For an elongated moment all the adults in the circle are bent over, with goofy expressions on our faces and bums in the air tracing out the letters of our names. Smiles creep over the faces of the students, then giggles break out and the one by one, bottoms start wiggling.
Acknowledgments

To be fair, evaluation is rarely the most glamorous part of a project, the most exciting, or the most popular. Nevertheless, we have been fortunate here to work with people who have been enormously supportive of the evaluation process, and with a clear sense of the ways in which it could be positive and constructive. We hope it has been. Firstly, credit goes to Polyglot Theatre, particularly artistic director Sue Giles, for commissioning a project evaluation as a significant component of their engagement, and for their commitment to interrogating and improving their own practice. Thanks should also go to Arts Victoria, who provided the funding that made the extended school residency possible. Project manager Mel Robertson was a powerhouse of logistical and organisational fabulousness. Thanks, too, to all the artists – particularly lead artist and project director Jodee Mundy – who were generous with their time and accommodated the evaluators in their sessions with grace and patience. At Furlong Park School, the principal Robyn Lawrence has been consistently warm and supportive, allowing access to the school and freeing up staff to take part in interviews. We are grateful to the staff themselves for their thoughtful comments and willingness to be involved. Particularly, we need to single out Trudy Fraser, the AV coordinator and teacher at the school, who played a pivotal role in documenting much of the project, including the evaluation interviews and student activities. Trudy ran one of the student evaluation exercises herself, and was an invaluable support at all times. This evaluation process — and possibly the project itself — would not have happened nearly as well as it did were it not for her. Thanks are also extended to Lori, who was the interpreter in the teacher and student interviews. Not least, our thanks and affection are extended to the students at Furlong Park School for Deaf Children, who taught us a great deal, and did it in a spirit of warmth, humour and general delightfulness.
In 2009, artists from Polyglot Theatre spent a period of four months in residency at the Furlong Park School for Deaf Children, in Sunshine, in Melbourne's western suburbs. The project involved weekly workshops held over two school terms, as part of the Extended School Residency program funded by the Victorian state government's peak arts body, Arts Victoria.

Artists worked across a range of art forms, including dance, puppetry, visual arts, mime, theatre and Deaf poetry. From the start, the project employed a philosophy which emphasised the importance of process and child-led creative development over any imperative for a polished final artistic product. The residency did, however, also generate a final outcome – an evening where parents and family were invited to participate in an interactive event involving installation, performance, video, multi-media and a variety of visual art forms.

This evaluation was commissioned by Polyglot, as part of their engagement. Using a qualitative methodology, the authors employed interviews and participant observation to explore the hopes and expectations of key participating groups – students, artists and teachers – and the extent to which those hopes and expectations were met through the project. The evaluation also considered a number of key issues and dynamics which emerged out of the project.

The findings of the evaluation are that the residency was overwhelmingly successful in meeting the hopes and expectations of different participants. These included, most particularly: a growing and strengthening of the creative expression of the students engaged in the program; an increase in their confidence and, moreover, in an increase in their confidence in their own creative abilities and imaginings.

Through a child-led journey of creative development which emphasised process over output and shared social experience and exploration, the project gave value to the ideas and abilities of the students at Furlong Park school, and was able in important ways to transform the school environment and create opportunities for teachers and parents to see and appreciate the children they care for in new ways. Significantly, as well, where creative 'output' and 'process' are frequently counter-posed within arts practice, the project led to the creation of a final outcome – a night of performance and interaction – which was very much a testament to, and a celebration of, the creative and social process out of which it emerged.

Culturally, the project made an important contribution to the school environment through celebrating and strengthening of Deaf culture and language, particularly through the presence of Deaf adult role models, the creation of a language-positive environment, and the development of creative skills in the areas of performance.
and embodied communication. The project also enabled an exchange – cultural and personal – between the students in Sunshine and Deaf young people in Cambodia, which, although not as central an aspect of the project as was initially envisaged, was nevertheless positive.

This report also identified areas of challenge within the experience of the Extended School Residency. These include, firstly, Polyglot’s intersections with formal institutional spaces. Relationships between artists and teachers at the school struggled at times, with the approaches of both groups – and their understandings of the project and of each other – at odds with one another. Nevertheless, we found that this was a situation which improved over the duration of the project. Secondly, organisational and communication structures occasionally fell short of ideal, something which likely contributed to the frustration and uncertainty felt by school staff at times, and also meant that some artists felt less supported by the organisation than perhaps they should have. Thirdly, we discuss the engagement with children with profound additional needs as challenging but also inspiring.

In highlighting areas of challenge, this report emphasises that these should be seen as areas of possibility for Polyglot’s creative practice. Indeed, we suggest that one of Polyglot’s strengths is the challenge it presents, along with the calibre of the people who make up the organisation, and the quality and nature of its engagement. To this extent, a number of recommendations are made which are intended to offer insights into thinking through ways that that challenge can be made as creatively positive and richly generative as possible. We draw attention to the ways that Polyglot was able to transform the environment of the school, creating a vibrant space for explorations and new imaginings, and for new appreciations of the capacities and thoughts of the students.
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1. Introduction
INTRODUCTION

Background to the project

The Extended School Residency project at the Furlong Park School for Deaf children first emerged in embryonic form in 2004, when Polyglot Theatre was approached by Deaf Children Australia (DCA) to produce an Auslan-interpreted performance of one of their shows. Rather than simply having interpreters standing on the side of the stage, Polyglot began to think about ways of making the interpreters part of the performance — characters in their own right. Following this, Polyglot and DCA explored some initial collaborations with DCA, including the creative development for a project, ‘Echo’, but this work was never produced, and in the words of Polyglot Artistic Director Sue Giles, the collaboration ‘all went on the backburner’. Before it did, however, Polyglot came into contact with Furlong Park School, and began the first steps of building a relationship. Then in 2008, Sue reconnected with Jai Hartnell, an artist who had worked for Polyglot in the early years of the decade, before moving to Cambodia and commencing work with Epic Arts, a disability arts organisation in Kampot. Jai was working specifically with a group of young, Deaf Cambodians, and her and Sue began talking about the possibility of an international collaboration. Polyglot ran some workshops in Cambodia, with long-term Polyglot artist Heath McIvor travelling there. In 2008, as well, Polyglot was approached by the state government’s peak arts body Arts Victoria and the Victorian Department of Education to do another Extended School Residency (having previously done one in a different context). Out of this opportunity, the partnership was cemented between Polyglot and Furlong Park School for Deaf Children.

Most broadly, the residency involved workshops conducted in the school on a weekly basis over two terms. Artists worked across a range of art forms, including dance, puppetry, visual arts, mime, theatre and Deaf poetry. From the start, the project employed a philosophy which emphasised the importance of process and child-led creative development over any imperative for a polished final artistic product. The residency did, however, also generate a final outcome – an evening where parents and family were invited to participate in an interactive event involving installation, performance, video, multi-media and a variety of visual art forms.

Participating groups

A number of distinct groups were participants within, or otherwise engaged by this project:

- **Students** at the Furlong Park School for the Deaf: This was a diverse group including approximately 40 children between grades prep and six. This group included some children with identified special needs resulting from developmental, intellectual and physical disability. Within the student population, there was a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, personal histories and family environments. The students include
signing deaf and lip-reading deaf. A large number have cochlear implants. There is a significantly diverse range of experience in terms of exposure to Deaf culture and language outside the school environment, i.e. in students' home and family lives.

- **Teachers and staff** at the school: There are six classes at the school, each of which has one teacher and one teacher’s aid. There are additional teacher’s aides working in the class for children with special needs. The school’s staff also includes a principal and an AV teacher. Teachers at the school include both deaf and hearing people who have trained as teachers of the deaf. Within the latter group, there is considerable variation in levels of Auslan proficiency.

- **Polyglot Theatre and artists**: Polyglot is one of Australia’s leading children’s theatre companies, with a 32 year history. Its philosophy begins with recognising and valuing the instinctive creativity of all children, and hinges on the following values: originality; respect for audiences, children and artists; collaboration; sustainability; excellence; diversity; and accessibility. Within this project, artistic director Sue Giles was the Polyglot staff member most centrally involved.

  Other artists working as part of the residency were engaged by the company specifically for the project. They came from a range of artistic backgrounds (visual arts, physical theatre and puppetry), include both hearing and deaf, and with degrees of fluency in Auslan ranging from beginner to proficient. Some had worked for Polyglot before, including some with extensive histories of working for Polyglot over many years. Others had not worked with Polyglot previously, including some Deaf artists, and hearing artists with Auslan proficiency, who were engaged in part because of their skills and experience in Deaf culture and arts, their language skills, and connection to the Deaf community. The contracted personnel also included a project manager, and the two social researchers who are the authors of this report.

- **Parents and families** of Furlong Park students. Again, this is a culturally and ethnically diverse group. In some cases, the parents and family members of students are also Deaf, while in other cases students are the only Deaf members of their families (whose other members may or may not sign). Because students are picked up and transported to and from the school from across the Western suburbs, many parents have little day-to-day contact with the school and its staff. Their lack of direct involvement in the project meant that parents and families were not a focus on the evaluation process, although as a group they were far from insignificant, particularly in regards to the final outcome.

- **Young people and artists at Epic Arts** in Kampot, Cambodia: The Cambodian-Australian exchange dimension of the project involved young people and artists associated with Epic Arts, a disability arts organisation working with young adults in the city of Kampot. These young people were significantly older than the Furlong Park students. Working with the young people at Epic Arts was Jai Hartnell, an artist who had previously worked for Polyglot in Australia. Heath McIvor travelled to Kampot as part of the 2009 exchange, as did Jodee Mundy. Heath had previously travelled to Cambodia to run some Polyglot workshops in 2008.

To varying degrees, and in different ways, each of these groups was affected by or involved in the project in some fashion. This evaluation has sought to be attentive to the impacts of the project on each of these distinct groups, and the differing expectations, interests and understandings which each brought to it, and the learnings and experiences they took away. The focus, however, has been on the Australian dimension of the project. Where the
Cambodian-Australian exchange aspect of the project is discussed and explored, it is largely to the extent it was experienced from the perspective of Furlong Park. We recognise this as a limitation of the project. Throughout this report, we refer to three main groups — teachers, students, and artists — but we also recognise the heterogeneity of each group, and the diversity of stories, backgrounds and experiences contained within them. Indeed, an important theme in this report will be the importance of dynamics which cut across these groups, particularly individuals' sense of identification (or not) as part of a Deaf community.

The evaluation

The evaluation process which has resulted in this report was commissioned by Polyglot prior to the project's commencement. At its outset, the scope of the evaluation was broad, and Polyglot did not have specific research questions which they were looking to have answered. Accordingly, the evaluation was oriented initially towards a number of broad aims:

1. To identify the expectations, aims and hopes of each of the participating groups at the outset of the project.
2. To pay attention to the ways that these changed (or stayed the same) across the duration of the project, and to assess the success of the project in meeting them.
3. To identify, explore, and situate the project within, the broader social, cultural, and political context.
4. To be attentive to, and assess, the various social dynamics and issues of importance which may emerge throughout the progression of the project. These may include: dynamics between hearing and Deaf participants, and between those who can and cannot sign; dynamics between different groups in the project; and points where aims and understandings diverge or conflict.
5. To create a space for all involved in the project, including children, to be reflective about their own thoughts, experiences, practices and expectations.

The more concrete questions, issues and dynamics which are taken up in this report are ones which have emerged through the process of evaluation as important and significant. That is, the evaluation has sought above all to be responsive to the dynamics of the project as it unfolded across the duration of the residency.

Methodology

The evaluation has employed a qualitative methodology, oriented towards understanding patterns of meaning, and exploring self and collective narratives of understanding, experience, value and engagement. Participant observation was used across the duration of the project, including on several occasions when the researchers were present at the school, during interactions with staff from Polyglot and other artists involved in the project. As part of this approach, informal conversations and interactions were particularly important however more formalised interviews and discussions were also employed to create spaces for people to reflect on the project and their experiences of it. These included one-on-one interviews with teachers, both at the start of the project
and at the end, as well as group discussion-based evaluative activities with students, and one-on-one interviews with artists. In each of these instances, a semi-structured model of interviewing has been used.

Drawing on ethnographic understandings of participant observation has allowed us to be attentive to people’s behaviour and embodied forms of communication, as well as to their words. In the context of a Deaf school, where levels of language proficiency are varied, and where embodied and gestural forms of communication are a vital part of Deaf language and cultural communication, this has been particularly important.

In March 2010, a draft version of this report was presented to key project participants, at a workshop attended by Polyglot’s Artistic Director Sue Giles, General Manager Simon Abrahams, and Program Manager Mandy Field, as well as project director Jodee Mundy and Furlong Park school principal Robyn Lawrence. The workshop was a chance for participants to feedback into the evaluation process before the final draft was submitted. The final version of this paper has been written to take into account that feedback – including comments made at the time, and those submitted later via email. In this way, we sought to have an evaluation process that was engaged and dialogical, and a final report which we hope represents accurately the experiences of those involved in the project.

Methodological issues:

- Neither of the researchers are deaf, nor are we from the Deaf community. Neither of us have Auslan skills and so were reliant on using interpreters. This had implications for communication, but also meant that we were approaching the space as outsiders to the dominant culture and language.

- Further challenges emerged around the communication delays of some of the students, their young ages, as well as the fact that we were reliant on interpreters (that is, our ability to communicate with language was also mediated). These factors meant that in gaining insights into the experience of the students, participant observation took on a particularly important and central role in the evaluation process.

- Use of interpreters, especially in interviews with teachers: Interviews with all teachers were videoed, to ensure that the Deaf teachers participating were recorded as directly as possible. We recognise, though, that this report is written in English, and where the voices of the Deaf teachers are included (as with the students), the words have been mediated through an interpreter. As non-Auslan users, working in a written format and in the English language, we do not know any other way around this except to be upfront about these limitations, and endeavour to be attentive to multiple forms of communication and expression.

- Anonymity: names of teachers and students have not been included, although we use descriptive details to identify and contextualise individuals, including whether students are amongst the younger or older groups, or special needs class, and whether teachers are deaf or hearing, and what roles they have played within the project. Exceptions amongst the teachers are AV teacher Trudy Fraser and school principal Robyn Lawrence, who both played key and distinctive roles as individuals, and are so identified. Artists involved in the project are named, either by their first or full names.
SETTING THE SCENE

Child’s Play and Learning

There is a large and vibrant body of literature concerned with such aspects of creativity as play and improvisation, and their potentials for children’s learning and development. Here, we offer a brief (eclectic) foray through some of this work – a jumping-off point for thinking about the ideas contained in this report.

Writing in the 1970s, the Russian psychologist and theorist Vygotsky revolutionized thinking about play. Play, he argued, was a complex phenomenon – the leading activity of children’s development, and a means of adaptive and emergent meaning-making and communication.¹ Far from something to be dismissed as the immature expense of excess energy, as lacking substance or value, or as the opposite of serious learning – ‘play time’ vs ‘class time’ – Vygotsky insisted that ‘play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development’². In play, he argued, ‘a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is though he were a head taller than himself’.³ Play, then, is a space for challenge, for learning, for imagining. Play is for taking new steps, for taking risks, for growing, for being and for becoming. In the context of education and learning, others suggest that play is an activity that works across the lifespan, in a way that is ‘transformative, agentive, fun and developmental’.⁴ And, in a different disciplinary context, significant work in anthropology and the emerging discipline of performance studies points to the importance of ritual and performance in the experience of being human.⁵

In thinking about communication, there is a theoretical approach within writing on creativity and the arts which argues that communication is fundamentally improvisational.⁶ Anthony Perone, for instance, argues that

In the context of human verbal activity, speaking and meaning-making is emergent. In other words, the activity of speaking and meaning-making is not pre-formed prior to the activity but in fact performed in the course of activity; both the activity(ies) and the meaning(s) are improvised.⁷

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³ Ibid.
⁷ Perone, ‘Improvising with Adult English Language Learners’
If communication is improvisational, moreover, improvisation – ‘free play’ – is itself fundamentally communicative. Improvisation cannot but be relational – a process of exploration and meaning-making through interaction with others, and/or with the world around. In improvisational theatre, the relational premise of improvisation is bound up in the central tenets of making and receiving offers, of building on what is given, on a ‘yes, and...’ approach. Improvisation and play is, moreover, fundamentally bound up in the to and fro between imaginative world and the physical world, between thoughts and actions, imaginings and events.

What, though, of the role of adults in play? How do adults approach play and improvisation, and how does their approach differ from that of children? Perone proposes three key tensions in the ways adults approach improvisation activities in the context of language learning and teaching environments, which can be extended and adapted here to the teacher-child dialogic relationship. In the first instance, there is ‘the reliance on a priori scripts versus creating activity emergently’, in other words, pre-determined structures as opposed to open, in-process development. In the second instance, there is a tension in the adult approach to improvisation, in the development of the individual versus the development of the group, and the neglect of the dialogic learning of the social experience (put another way, the mutual meaning-making through the embodied practice of social experience and sense of community). The final tension is around the embarrassment of participating in a new ‘language’, due to an adult focus on ‘correctness’, amplified by prior educational experience and process of expert ‘judgment’. Tensions, though, are not unsurpassable obstacles. The process of play may well be the process of ‘playing out’ those tensions: the practice itself becomes transformative.

The Swedish scholar Gunilla Lindqvist offers another perspective on the adult relationship to play, and, more particularly, the relationship between adults and children in play. Building on Vygotsky’s work, she argues for a ‘creative pedagogy of play’ in which children and adults interact in jointly created, shared ‘playworlds’. It is within such playworlds – hinged on the dialectical relationship of imagination and reality, and as a site for dialogical exchange with their peers and with adults – that children develop consciousness, engage with and make sense of the world around them. We might also ask to what extent adults, too, might grow and be transformed through the interactional space of playworlds.

Finally, in thinking about the richness and potentialities of creativity, play and improvisation for (and by) children, we might also consider the possibilities of creative exploration and play for Deaf children. It has often been observed that the communication impacts of Deafness create significant obstacles to the development of social relationships amongst Deaf children, especially given that the vast majority do not have a shared language – or shared language fluency – with their parents, neighbors, and community. In this context, it has often been asserted that socialization for Deaf children occurs primarily in Deaf schools, making socialization – the building of social relationships and networks – a particularly critical dimension of Deaf education, both in terms of relationships between Deaf children and their Deaf peers, and between Deaf children and the hearing worlds.

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9 Perone, ‘Improvising with Adult English Language Learners’
they have to navigate. Intrinsically relational, and encouraging embodied interaction and other non-aural forms of communication, might not creativity and play offer potentially profound possibilities for Deaf children, for whom the building of social networks is of such acute importance? Creativity is also, as we will see, intrinsically bound up in the generation and exchange of Deaf culture and community, which for most Deaf children is accessed primarily through Deaf schools.

**Creativity and Deafness**

Historically, there has been relatively little scholarly attention paid to the topic of creativity of and for Deaf children, at least in mainstream academic literature on education and childhood learning. Much of what limited work was done – particularly in the 1980s and earlier – concentrated on social scientific studies which sought, through various tests and experiments, to ‘measure’ the creative capacity of deaf children through comparison with hearing children. From these studies, various claims were made about the diminished creative capacities of deaf children. Singer and Lenahan, for example, in 1976, suggested that deaf children demonstrated less creativity and imagination than hearing children. Silver, in a 1977 study, argued that deaf children showed less originality and engaged in less imaginative play, than did their hearing counterparts, in the verbal domain (emphasis added). And in 1990, a study by Cornelius and Hornett similarly suggested that capacity for imaginative play is reduced in children of a certain level of linguistic deficiency (again, emphasis added).

Running throughout these various studies is a tendency to approach deafness in terms of deficit and lack – through comparison to a hearing ‘norm’. Historically, deaf children have been less likely to receive special programs based on their abilities, as they have been to receive programs framed in terms of disability, a tendency which arguably continues today. Indeed, in thinking about the types of studies mentioned above, Ebrahim is one scholar who points out that deaf students’ ‘under-performance’ is likely a consequence of ‘the failure to establish mutual communication between the deaf children and the hearing assessors, rather than the consequence of cognitive deficit.’ Ebrahim’s response, is not to do away with the comparative model of assessment, but to focus his own study on the nonverbal reasoning ability of children – still utilising a similarly ‘scientific’ method of assessment (the ‘Matrix Analogies Test – Expanded Form’) – and conduct tests in sign.

His results offer a counter-point to earlier research, arguing that the deaf children in his study are no less inclined towards creative thinking than are the hearing children. Other studies, similarly, have insisted on the

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capacities of deaf children for creative thought and expression – originality, use of linguistic inventions and creative language construction, for example. ¹⁷ Focusing on nonverbal communication, and recognizing the linguistic modes of gesture and mime, such studies have sought to move away from a privileging of verbal communication modes. Nevertheless, as valuable as such research may be in challenging the assumption of deafness as a deficit, it remains bound to a comparative model in which deafness is understood in relation to a hearing norm. Such studies represent, moreover, a particular and contingent form of knowing and ascribing meaning to deafness – a scientific understanding of deafness which comes close to (and sometimes falls into) a medicalisation of deafness. What is missing is recognition of the culture of deafness, indeed, of Deafness.

An altogether different reading of the relationship between Deafness and creativity comes in the way of the vibrant explosion of artistic happenings and creations within and around the Deaf community. It is at this point that ‘deafness’ becomes ‘Deafness’ – note the capital D – identity, culture, and language. (This report follows the convention of using a lower-case ‘d’ when talking about the audiological state of not hearing, and a capital ‘D’ when talking about Deafness as identity and culture, including when talking about Deaf children and Deaf schools as a site for culture and community). Notions of Deafness assert the positivity of being Deaf, rejecting the idea of deafness as a ‘lack’ or absence. Similarly, depictions of deafness as a disability have been hotly contested. For related reasons, cochlear implants – devices that can simulate hearing – have become a point of impassioned debate, with some resisting strongly on the basis of preserving and defending their culture and language, and others arguing for the benefits of implants in enabling greater participation in a hearing-centred world, with a host of other positions, stories and experiences in between. ¹⁸

Irene Leigh et al note that while deaf people have long had a ‘sense of community’, the academic notion of Deaf culture was nonexistent till the 1970s. ¹⁹ Highlighting a particular date is likely to always be contested, but broadly speaking we can point to the emergence and strengthening of ideas of Deafness around the latter decades of the twentieth century. Around this time, different sign languages began to receive long-overdue recognition as distinct languages in their own right. In the broader social context of the 1970s and 1980s – in places like Australia, Britain, Canada and America – identity-based political movements emerged, asserting new forms of identification and cultural belonging. In this context, the emergence of Deaf identity might be considered (in part) alongside the emergence of identities around gender, ethnicity, or sexuality.

As ideas of Deaf culture and community were strengthened, articulated and celebrated, new avenues for creative expression burst forth. In America, the National Theatre for the Deaf began in the late 1960s, building on a concept which had been in development since the 1950s. It is out of the NTD that Visual Vernacular first developed, being taken up in turn by the Australian Theatre of the Deaf which developed in the early 1970s, and was launched as a professional company in 1979. American Sign Language Literature emerged as a recognised,


¹⁸ A documentary released in 2000, Sound of Fury, directed by Josh Aronson, explores some of these stories. See http://www.pbs.org/wnet/soundandfury/index.html

vibrant literary form, and one which drew on a rich “oral” tradition that had been passed down through generations long before ‘official’ recognition took place. Deaf literature is growing and being celebrated within other Deaf languages, too, including Auslan and British Sign Language, as is Deaf poetry. In Australia, Deaf Can Dance has emerged as a leading Deaf dance troupe, performing Australia’s first full-length Deaf dance piece – Sound of Silence – in 2008 at the Melbourne Fringe Festival.

Creativity then, is not something which Deaf people may or may not have – in greater or lesser quantities than hearing people – it is a dimension of being human which finds expression in a diversity of cultural and social spaces, including – vibrantly and colourfully – in the Deaf community. Creativity within the Deaf community is a means through which Deaf culture is communicated, and a means through which it grows.

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20 Karen Christie and Dorothy M. Wilkins, ‘A Feast for the Eyes: ASL Literacy and ASL Literature’, *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, vol. 2 (1), 1997


22 See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-xIZyVKRY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-xIZyVKRY) for the trailer of the performance.
PROJECT SUMMARY

Between July and December 2009, the Extended School Residency took place through a series of regular workshops held with the students every Tuesday during terms 3 and 4 of the school year. Each Tuesday Polyglot session involved three workshops. The first was held with the younger class, the second with the older class, and the third with the Swans (Students with Additional Needs), who were a small group of around two or three on any given week. The first two workshops were each 2 hours in duration, and the third workshop ran for 1 hour each week. As well as students and artists, teachers were present in the workshops, although there was often a changeover of teaching staff half way through the two hour blocks.

Over the two terms of the residency, a large number of artists were involved in various capacities. Generally, personnel arrangements were subject to a great degree of flux and change. A number of people who had been expected to be engaged in the project as core artistic personnel were ultimately unavailable, and other artists were brought in to replace them, some of whom were only available or engaged for short amounts of time. In addition, several personnel, including the lead artist and other artists, the project manager and the authors of this report, were absent at different times, whether due to other commitments, travel or personal circumstances. This meant, on the one hand, a vibrant and dynamic rotation of creative personnel and influences, but on the other hand it also presented organisation difficulties and the risk of a lack of continuity across the duration of the residency.

In setting up the residency, the school’s primary contact at Polyglot was Sue Giles, the artistic director. Sue was actively involved in the workshops, running and participating in many of them. She had a longstanding relationship with the school, including the principal Robyn Lawrence, and had played an important role in getting the residency funded, organised and on the ground. In a day-to-day sense, a project manager Mel Robertson was engaged to oversee the logistical and organisation dimensions of the project, manage dialogue and relationships between artists, Polyglot, the school, and Cambodian participants. In actually holding together many of the disparate wings of the project, the lead artist Jodee Mundy ultimately ended up playing a critical role in communicating between the different artists and the school (via the principal, Robyn). Even while she was away, regular weekly updates and session summaries provided an overview of what was happening, who was doing what, and what plans were for forthcoming sessions.

The sessions: first term

Beginning in the first term (school term three), the sessions put a great deal of emphasis on the development of creative and imaginative confidence as well as skills, encouraging the students to improvise and develop a sense of freedom in their physical and artistic expression, and generating creative ideas through the processes of engagement and improvisation.
At the outset of the residency, Sue and Jodee played important roles in leading the workshop. Another artist, Medina, who is Deaf, was involved in many of the workshops in first term of the residency. With a strong background in sign poetry and Deaf theatre, Medina focussed particularly on teaching the students skills and techniques associated with Visual Vernacular, a style of theatre which emphasises the potential for ‘signing space’ as a ‘kind of stage’ and draws upon the tendency within signing languages to express ideas in a visual chronology (see below for more on VV). Heath, a puppetry artist with Auslan skills, was also involved in first two sessions, as well as in the sessions at the end of term 4. In between, he was working overseas on other projects, but also spent two weeks in Cambodia with the artists and students at Epic Arts. Likewise, Jodee was absent from the project for a period from around mid August to mid October (that is, from just after the fourth workshop in term three, to just after the start of term 4) while she worked on other project commitments in the UK (she also spent two weeks in Cambodia at Epic Arts with Heath), although she continued to play a critical and very ‘hands on’ role from a distance, particularly in ensuring that regular updates and session reports were circulated. Sue was also due to be away in late August and September, and with some many absences new artists were engaged to run sessions. Leonie, a puppeteer and maker with a history of involvement with Polyglot was brought in after a few weeks of term three to facilitate some of the sessions when Sue was due to be away. From about the middle of term three, another two artists were also brought in: Mark, a hearing visual artist who is also a native Auslan user from a Deaf family, was brought in to work with Leonie; and Anna, a dancer, was brought in to work with Medina, who she had worked with previously through the Deaf Can Dance troupe (Anna is also Deaf). All four of these artists, but Anna and Medina particularly, took on a key role in running sessions in the last half of term three.

Without giving a comprehensive account of all of the workshops, the following list is intended to give a sense of the types of activities which took place during the sessions:

- Developing mime skills — Jodee’s background is in devising theatre and performance, and her areas of expertise include both mime and Deaf theatre. Jodee, then, was in a strong position to lead mime activities and games, while also holding a sense of the bigger picture of the project’s trajectory and process of creative development.
- Making cubby houses and props from cardboard boxes — exploring physical space and interacting with objects
- Physical theatre games such the ‘FIRE’ game, where someone signs ‘fire’, ‘flood’, ‘wind’ and ‘sun’, and people have to respond to the signs with particular actions (lying on back in the sun, being blown around by the wind, etc.)
- Emotional drawing exercises — drawing lines, dots, patterns etc in such a way that reflect particular emotional states (happy, sad, angry etc.)
- Improvisation with newspaper, masking tape — making things, interacting with them, creating games and gestures etc.
- Making puppets, and using light to create shadow puppet shows
- Costume making with cardboard, paper, tape etc.
Towards the end of the first term of the residency, Furlong Park received a video postcard from the Deaf students at Epic Arts in Kampot, Cambodia, where artist Jai Hartnell was leading the Cambodian link aspect of the project. The video follows the students through ‘One Day in Kampot’, from sunrise through to them meeting at the Epic Arts Café, then to the markets to buy food for lunch, home to a Cambodian house, back to the Epic Arts Centre for arts classes and then down to the riverside which is the social space for the students to hang out with each other and their other friends, mostly from the wider Cambodian Deaf community. In response to this, the students and artists (particularly the AV and media coordinator, Trudy) start making plans for a video response, ‘A Day in Furlong Park’.

**The sessions: second term**

In the second term of the residency, Sue and Jodee again took up the central role of running the workshops. Anna and Medina did not run any sessions in this term, while Mark and Leonie were involved but in more of an ad hoc fashion. Heath returned in early November, and was quite heavily involved in the last sessions leading up to the final outcome on the 26 November.

The second term of the residency saw a continuation of many of the activities and explorations begun in the first term. The notable difference was that the sessions started to become oriented towards the creation of a final outcome / showing. This had not been something assumed in the initial planning for the project, but was something which participants decided would be a positive outcome. As part of this preparation, the older group was led quite intensively in a process of developing a Visual Vernacular performance which would be part of the final outcome, but which would also be filmed as a sequel / carry-on from a VV film produced by the Epic Arts students in Cambodia.

From the outset, visions for a final outcome involved an event that would be interactive, involving parents and visitors in the Polyglot experience, and oriented towards showcasing the process of the residency rather than polished products or a sit-and-watch staged performance. An idea advocated quite early on was to transform the school environment into an interactive and experiential space which people are invited to move through — in a way, representing the journey of the residency and inviting people to share in it and experience it for themselves. To this end, much of the creative development with the students in term four was around generating ideas for this vision.

While this was going on, and largely outside the Tuesday sessions, the schools AV teacher Trudy was leading the students in developing a video response to the video postcard from Kampot. ‘A Day at Furlong Park’ showed the Furlong Park students travelling to school by buses which travel across Melbourne’s western suburbs to collect them each morning. It follows them working in the school, on literacy and numeracy as well as art, and then walking down the road to the local milk bar to collect their lunch orders on a Friday lunchtime. Back at the school, the students are outside playing Australian Rules Football and catching butterflies, before going back to class for cooking lessons followed by a Polyglot session. The video leaves the students as they get back into their bus groups to travel home at the end of the school day. The ‘A Day at Furlong Park’, video was completed at the
end of September, and sent to the students at Epic Arts in Cambodia. Both the Cambodian and Australian videos were shown as part of the final outcome.

**Visual Vernacular**

The use and teaching of Visual Vernacular was a central dimension of the project, and the VV performance a key outcome. The following brief description of VV partly draws on material provided by Jodee Mundy in one of her session summaries.

Visual Vernacular is a style of theatre developed by the National Theatre of the Deaf in America, which has influenced the Australian Theatre of the Deaf and their style of work. VV is a vernacular in the way it utilises and appeals to the vernacular codes of the cinematic medium, including framing, fields of vision, and angles of view. It encourages signers to ‘use the signing space in front of them as “a kind of stage”’. Visual Vernacular techniques include: the use of variable levels of scale such as ‘long shot’ and ‘close up’; fast- and slow-motion to slow down or speed up the action, building anticipation as the story unfolds; zooming in and out to gain a variety of perspectives of an object or person; creation of a panoramic view to ”set the stage” for the story and develop the story environment; and role shifting to show movements, activities, communications and interactions by and between various characters in a story.

So, for example, in an early workshop Medina led the students through the story of a person walking through a landscape and meeting lots of creatures along the way. In this scenario, VV story-telling might switch between the depiction of ‘walking’ as communicated through fingers ‘walking’ along an arm, and as communicated by a whole-body performance of walking. The story-telling might also involve role shifts, with the signer switching between acting-out the person walking, and the creatures and aspects of the environment which she encounters. VV, then, introduces people to basic conventions of the paralinguistics of story-telling in sign language, and its relationship to theatre.

**The final outcome**

The decision to have a final outcome was made during the process of the residency, and not presumed at the beginning of it. Indeed, Polyglot consistently emphasised the importance of creative process over output. To this extent, what eventuated was not so much an instrumental output as an outcome, a night of performance, installation and interaction which served not as a counterpoint to the process, but rather as a showcase and celebration of it.

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The outcome took place on the 26th November. The students – (most of the students who took part in the residency also took part in the outcome) – stayed behind after school, and from around 6pm parents, other family members and friends began gathering outside the entrance to the school.

At around 6.30pm, the double doors swing open and the audience are invited to enter by a welcoming party dressed in paper costume constructions. Inside, what was previously the hallway is transformed into a tunnel stretching out beyond them. Art works decorate the sides, faces peer out from windows and small holes, cardboard flaps are lifted to reveal hidden creations, and shadow puppets perform.

Through the tunnel and into a corridor, documentation from the residency – words, photos, other images, describing and depicting what has happened, why and how – is pasted on the walls. Also included here are the self-portraits done by the Furlong Park students in the early weeks of the project, and those done by the young people in Kampot, Cambodia.

From the corridor, the audience move through the three rooms which have been the central hub of activity over the residency’s two terms. The art room is transformed into a space of sensory exploration and creation. Drawing its inspiration from the artists’ engagement with the Swans – the students with additional needs – the room is a hands-one celebration of the improvisations with newspaper and tape that the artists and students shared together. Sticky tape lines criss-cross the space of the room, holding together a thicket of newspaper creations – balls, strips of paper, strange shapes. On the large table in the middle of the room, newspapers and tape are piled up and the audience is invited to make their own creations to add to the installation. Underneath the table, a cubby world is created, with strips of newspaper hanging down – a space for exploring, for feeling the touch of paper against skin, for lying on backs and gazing at the paper garden.

Next door, the small drama room has televisions showing the two videos – A Day in Furlong Park, and One Day in Kampot. Stacked up around the screens are the cardboard boxes which the students have been making and remaking as messy constructions, houses, and shadow puppet theatres. Off to the side, another small space – a ‘secret room’ – entices, where children invite curious explorers to draw their own face, to contribute to the collected creative energies.

In the multi-purpose room – the large hall where most of the residency workshops have taken place – the audience now congregates in front of a giant paper wall. Behind it, shadows start to flicker and play. Light and darkness create moving textures, and communicate the ‘tap, tap, tap’ which grows bigger and more insistent until fingers tap through the paper, creating little holes that are torn bigger to reveal faces and then whole bodies – a joyous ‘breaking through’ of bodies and emotions.

The journey continues outside, through the back door of the multi-purpose room to the sports track. The children line up in front of the audience. Opening the event, one of the Swans students unwinds a roll of tape – the end held by Jodee as he steps backwards, extending the line across the ‘stage’. He is re-creating here what has been a performative ritual for him throughout the sessions, doing it here as part of a social, relational event.
Then, one by one, the students take turns to step forward, introducing themselves using sign language, 'My name is ……' and telling the audience their favourite part of the residency experience. As each child finishes they run along the line and back again, slapping the outstretched hands of their schoolmates, grinning and cheering. Some are so excited they set off for running before their introduction is complete, prompting delighted laughter from the people watching. The 'bow' at the end - with the children holding hands and facing their families and friends – is more like a Mexican Wave. Indeed, straight lines are not a feature of any part of the performance, or, for that matter, of the two terms leading up to it.

A busy, energetic rendition of the ‘Fire, Rain, Sun, Wind’ game follows, culminating in an energetic rush into the cardboard ‘houses’ spread out on the astro-turf behind the running track. The older students gave a live performance of their VV piece. In a line, they sign and embody their pieces in a narrative which develops, passed on from one to the next, and tells the story of a boy moving through an Australian landscape, swimming past a shark, rescued by a girl on a surfboard and travelling through a Melbourne cityscape. Back in the bush a student becomes a flying, squawking bird. Another is kangaroo who gives our protagonist a bouncy ride.

The Furlong Park VV performance is a direct continuation from a videotaped VV performance by the Cambodian young people, starting at the point where they ended (mid-shot, suspended airborne). Back inside the hall, videos of the two tapes are shown back-to-back, a single story spanning from Kampot to Sunshine, and holding within it a world of both cultural differences and commonalities...

Polyglot invited two artists to attend the outcome and provide critical feedback, as artists, on the event and their experience of it. One of these artists, Asphyxia – a Deaf circus performer and puppeteer – wrote of the show, ‘There was a real sense of vibrant energy about the project – the kids seemed to be oozing with it and so did the artists. I left feeling uplifted and inspired.’ Emily Sexton, Creative Producer of the Melbourne Fringe Festival and a theatre maker and producer herself, wrote this:

In 2009 I’ve seen 254 shows. This was one of my most joyous experiences of performance.

Rapture, confidence and pride exuded from these kids in a way I’ve yet to encounter amongst any other performance by young people. It caused me to reflect upon the lack of creativity in a normal school play – these performance modes showcase discipline and rehearsal, and mostly the creative genius of the drama teacher. In Polyglot’s work, creative exchange and ideas are happening in the performance, with the parents, as led by the kids themselves… [T]he entire production had a fantastic spontaneity, that highlighted and celebrated the kids’ creativity on their own terms.

The reports of both of these artists are included as Appendix A to this document.
2. The Project: Expectations and Experiences
AT THE OUTSET: HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS

Prior to the commencement of the residency, and in the first few weeks of it having begun, a series of interviews were conducted with a range of participants in the project. The aim of these interviews was to explore some preliminary questions: What were the hopes and expectations of different participants going into the project? To what extent were the understandings and goals of different participating groups (teachers, artists, Polyglot staff, students) aligned with each other? The intention, as well, was that exploring these initial questions would provide pointers to dynamics and issues which might emerge as significant throughout the process of the engagement. The interviews which were conducted included: an in-depth (two hour) face-to-face interview with the Jodee Mundy, the project director and lead artist in the residency; a series of short (ten to fifteen minute) face-to-face interviews with some of the teachers at Furlong Park School, including the principal Robyn Lawrence; and a written interview (via email) with Sue Giles, the artistic director of Polyglot, following on from a series of informal face-to-face discussions. An interviewing exercise with the students was also conducted, although this was of mixed value, and less generative of insights than were the periods of participant observation. The young ages of the students, and also the differing levels of communication ability, made it unrealistic to expect them to be able to articulate a sense of their expectations for the project before it had commenced. What proved much more useful was spending time with the students during the period of the project, and paying attention to the many different ways (through behaviour, emotion and degrees of participation, as well as through oral or signed communication) that they expressed their experience of the project. These findings are mostly presented in the subsequent section, ‘At the tail-end’, as well as in the more discursive sections in Part 3, ‘Key Issues and Dynamics’

The Artists

In initiating the Extended School Residency at Furlong Park, the Polyglot Theatre was beginning their engagement with the school from the perspective of a long established and deeply held philosophy and model of artistic practice. Particularly, this philosophy and model of practice includes a clear articulation of how the organisation and its artists understand and relate to children, and seek to involve them in the creative process as ‘experts’ in creativity, and active subjects capable of leading, teaching and inspiring artistic happenings.

It is through children’s play, acknowledging them as experts in creative thinking, as role models for spontaneous action and as willing believers in impossible things, that Polyglot’s theatre is made ... Polyglot’s vision is driven by thematic explorations of the place of children in society, and aims to stimulate conversation between children and adults. We seek to challenge, to foster
curiosity, to inspire, and to encourage children to take responsibility for themselves in the
imagined worlds that are created through the theatrical experiences presented.25

Building confidence and the intuitive creativity of children

This organisational vision and philosophy clearly influenced the hopes and expectations of the Polyglot artists
going into the project. Sue, the Artistic Director of Polyglot and one of the central artists involved in the
residency, described her hopes for the project to grow the confidence, self-esteem, capability, interest and
excitement of the students. Drawing on the philosophy of the organisation, she saw the way for this to be done as
being to recognise and give value to the thoughts and abilities of the children. Here, the role of the artists and
adults was not to ‘instruct and correct’, but to recognise what children themselves have to teach.

Because we place the kids at the centre of the exploration — allowing them time and space to
make their own choices and invent for themselves what happens; because we see them as the
experts, the ones who have instinctive response that goes to places adults can only dream of —
we want this project to give their contributions value in the eyes of the adults who care for them
— teachers, parents etc.

A similar understanding of the intuitive creativity of children was articulated by Jodee, the project director and
lead artist in the residency. Early in the project, and before the residency officially began, both Jodee and Sue
made some initial visits to the school to meet the children and talk to the school staff. On the first of these visits,
Sue led the children in a drawing activity, making self-portraits which were then sent to the young people at Epic
Arts in Kampot, Cambodia. Talking about this experience, Jodee said:

We did some drawings with the kids — self-portraits — and already it was such a springboard
to see where [the project] could go. You know, the way kids draw — everyone drew their faces
and I drew this one where I was, you know, trying to make it right. I looked at the kids’
drawings, and one had a blue eye and one had a purple one, and a scribble, and the nose was
lob-sided and the hair was spiky and the face wasn’t round, and they were awesome! And I just
thought, I’m so restricted as an adult. The next one I drew got more free, and then the next one,
till the last one I drew on the day was just, it was just free.

The concept of creativity as a ‘free’ process recurred several times in the conversation with Jodee, and then
subsequently in later conversations. It also shaped the way she thought about and envisaged the process of the
residency and the unfolding of the project, which strongly aligned with Polyglot’s understanding of the creative
process. In this context, Jodee explained that she saw the first term of the two-term residency (term 3) being
largely focussed on the children’s skill development:

It'll be really free. We're not going in there and telling them what to do; it's working out what the kids like and where each child's potential is just sitting, waiting to explode, or whatever way they express themselves — maybe very quietly, it could be very subtle things — so some kids might like drawing more, some kids might like drama, some kids might want to do sign poetry, or focus more on making and puppets ... I don't want to impose too much of my view of what's going to happen, because it's from the kids.

**Engagement with the formal school system**

In important ways Polyglot (as an organisation), Sue (as Artistic Director) and Jodee (as lead artist), shared core understandings about creativity and positive models of engagement with children, and expectations about the trajectory of the project. They also — although in different ways — shared a sense of being positioned in contradiestinction to the culture and practices of the formal education system. Indeed, where Polyglot emphasises collaboration, diffusion, spontaneity and organic creative practice, conversations with most of the artists involved in the project revealed an understanding of the formal school system as structured, top-down, and even detrimental to the innate creativity and creative expression of children. This is evident, for instance, when Sue comments,

> I think that this project has the potential to change the way teachers see their students, by providing a different context, allowing them to try new ways of communication and new ways of teaching, encouraging an exchange within the learning process.

Jodee echoed this sentiment when she expressed her own hope that the teachers would finish the project happy, but also having had access to some ideas for different approaches to engaging their students, and seeing their students in a different light. Both envisaged one potential benefit of the project being the opportunity to share with teachers at the school different models and philosophies of learning and teaching. Sue recognised that this perceived divergence in approaches and values had the potential to be a point of tension. What the artists were asking of the teachers was ‘to leave “learning” at the door and approach the kids’ activity and creativity with fresh eyes’.

> We’ve asked them to not be teachers, to be kids themselves and participate alongside them — not correcting, or helping but being part of the group. The thing that might be a challenge is getting them to see what is there without interpreting [it] through the lens they already have – ‘so and so can’t do that’, or ‘so and so won’t be able to contribute’. We’ve already proven to them that their kids can do so much more than they have ever seen before. Their instinct/training to guide and correct is strong and what we want is for them to be able to accept another kind of learning and learn themselves.
**Strengthening Deaf language and culture**

Importantly, where Sue’s attitudes towards creativity and children’s learning comes out of a long history of involvement with children’s theatre, Jodee’s critique of the formal education system emerges primarily from her own positioning and experience as a native Auslan user, and her identification as an insider within the Deaf community. From this perspective, she has a strong critique of the imbalance of deaf and hearing teachers within Deaf schools, and of the continuing dominance of oral and lip-reading modes of communication in the deaf education system generally. Many teachers of the deaf are themselves hearing, and with limited fluency in sign language, which means that many Deaf children — a majority of whom are born to hearing parents, and many of whom have little or no access to Deaf language or culture within the home — miss out on important stages of their linguistic and cognitive development.

In talking about her sense of her own role in the project, Jodee described acting like a ‘bridge’ between different worlds and experiences. ‘As someone who’s hearing but a native signer’, she said, ‘I understand both points of view. In that sense I’m a bridge — I know that’s a strength of mine.’ However while she clearly felt a strong sense of connection to the Deaf teachers at the school, and indeed was connected to some individually through personal networks, she communicated much less of a sense of identification with the hearing teachers.

The hearing teachers I don’t know. Some of some seem really lovely and it’s going to be great, [but] some of the ways that [some of them] approach the kids will challenge me, and I have to really watch myself and be detached, because I’m here as an artist. Some of them have already tested me, just the ways that they were treating the kids, that I don’t feel are appropriate. But I come from a native family, so, I don’t know — they’re the teachers, not me, but I have a different point of view.

In recognising the presence of dynamics in which she herself was a participant within, Jodee also pointed to the potential for those dynamics to play out as tensions between Deaf and hearing staff. This is part of the cultural politics of Deaf education, she suggested. Because Deaf teachers share the experience of Deafness, and of Deaf culture, with their students, they are often able to connect with those students in a way that hearing teachers cannot. These bonds can cause tensions between teachers, as can different teaching styles, particularly related to the use (or not) of sign language as a primary communication modality. Jodee talked about such instances of friction as “the undercurrents of the potential for cultural conflict” which she anticipated may emerge, even subtly, in the creative process of the residency. Likewise, Sue identified this as a potential point of tension within the project and the engagement with the school.

Mark, another of the artists engaged in the project — like Jodee, hearing but a native Auslan user from a Deaf family — raised similar issues about the potential for strained dynamics between Deaf and hearing participants. He was particularly critical of what he felt were often low levels of Auslan fluency amongst hearing teachers for the deaf, something he attributed in part to people’s sense of discomfort (‘inadequacy’) about the quality of their language ability. In this context, Mark saw an important part of his role in the project as being a positive language
role model for Deaf children. He also brought in a consideration of gender, noting that the school staff was exclusively female, and that particularly for students not from Deaf families, he could also offer a positive role model of an adult male fluent within Deaf culture and language. He linked this observation back to what he described as a sense of real frustration and sadness at the lack of role models available to Deaf children.

The importance of Deaf schools

Significantly, the critiques of the formal education system, and Deaf education, which Mark and Jodee both articulated, were fundamentally bound up in a strongly felt conviction of the importance of Deaf schools. Indeed, there was a real ambiguity here (although not necessarily a contradiction), where deep critiques of Deaf schools were being made, but alongside fierce assertions of the importance of those schools as sites of Deaf culture and language. As Jodee put it,

[The school] is where Deaf culture develops... Without Deaf schools culture can't grow, because that's the ground where it happens. The more input and stimulus you can give them, the more the culture develops ... The more you can give [the students] and the more opportunities they have, the better their development will be. Because you know, they're already disadvantaged!

The importance of Deaf schools is particularly acute, she argued, for those children not born into Deaf families. Mark agreed, describing the Deaf school as a vital social and cultural space. For those children without access to Deaf culture at home, he said, ‘it’s their world’. Indeed, the context which for these artists makes Deaf schools so important is also the underpinning reason for the importance of the Extended School Residency project. Their identification as part of the Deaf community, and their experiences and involvement with Deaf culture and language, significantly shaped their understanding of the potential benefits of the project, and their hopes and expectations for it. For Jodee,

In a big context, you just look at these kids who are in between parents who don’t communicate with them, and when they do communicated it’s often through interpreters, or they’re communicating to teachers whose sign language isn’t their native language. This is why this project’s so important.

What Jodee hoped for was an experience which would increase and extend the children’s communication abilities, their confidence in signing and ability to explore, celebrate and play with their language and expression. In a similar vein, she hoped for an experience which would expose the students to positive adult Deaf role models, which she argued were notably lacking in the lives of many Deaf children.
Cambodian exchange

Additionally, both Sue and Jodee expressed a real enthusiasm for the Cambodian exchange dimension of the project. Sue described her hopes for a “Cambodian link that is visual, personal and genuine — that allows an entry to a different world for each group and that has the seeds of an ongoing project.” Jodee, similarly, talked about her hope that the Cambodian young adults and the Furlong Park students would form friendships that extended over years of engagement — that “they grow up together”. Summing up her expectation for how the period of the residency would unfold, she said,

> We'll take all of that material — the drawings, the puppetry, what Medina does with them in terms of the sign poetry, me with the mime and the devising, and Sue with the overall concept — and with the kids’ guidance we’ll find a story between Deaf kids in Sunshine and Deaf young people in Kampot, where they're similar. Because Deaf culture is global, and the Deaf community isn't bounded by geography... the modality with which we communicated is what brings us together.

The Teachers

Eight teachers at Furlong Park School, including the school principal, were asked a series of questions in individual semi-structured interviews. Each was asked what they knew about the Extended School Residency, what they were expecting to happen and how they expected they would be involved. They were asked what they hoped might come out of the project, and what they thought the benefits could be. The teachers were asked about their attitudes towards the role of the arts and creativity in education; and also about any issues or dynamics which they thought might emerge through the process. Finally, they were asked what, at the end of the project, would allow them to consider the project a success.

Growing the confidence and creativity of the students

Overwhelmingly, teachers identified their most hoped-for outcome from the project as being an increase in the confidence of their students. Six of the teachers interviewed explicitly mentioned this as one of (if not the) primary benefit they hoped would result from the residency. One teacher, herself Deaf, drew a connection between this lack of confidence and independence, and the childhood experience of Deafness, pointing to the slower development of communication skills in many of the children. Difficulties in communicating mean that ‘they miss out on so much information’, and need to be show more, visually, what to do. She suggested as well that in bigger, mainstream schools, students have more people around them and can learn more from each other and the diverse influences surrounding them. This sentiment was echoed by another, hearing, teacher, who
argued that the small size of the school meant that the children have limited opportunities for ‘modelling’, and for being exposed to a diversity of people and ideas.

A number of teachers made direct connections between confidence and creativity, with another of the Deaf teachers describing her students’ lack of confidence as demonstrated through a lack of confidence in their own creative expression:

My students are very visual. Some have some skills in drawing, others in acting and drama. They’re all very different; they’ve got strengths in different areas. I have one or two that are not very keen on drawing. I’m trying to encourage them a bit more to be creative, because Deaf people are very creative, they always love to draw and express themselves, so I was surprised when some of the students get very grumpy about it ... For example, we make masks, and they go “oh, I can’t, I can’t”. I’m trying to encourage them to be more confident in their making of things, and their ideas. They’re really quite frightened to express themselves and express their ideas.

Another teacher, also Deaf, said that,

I’ve found with my own class that they’re not that creative. They can be, but they need a lot of encouragement. So by the end of six months it would be good if they could be doing [creative activities] by themselves, and build confidence and feel energetic, and feel like they’re good at it and they can do it.

Creative expression as communication

For these teachers, and others, what creativity and the arts offered their students was a form of communication and expression, particularly in a context where many of the children were significantly delayed in the development of communication skills. Robyn, the school principal, drew attention to the diversity of stages of language delay as being one of the major challenges facing the school:

The big thing for us here is the diversity of children in terms of their language delay. We’ve got lots of different language levels: we’ve got children who are full Auslan users and children who are really oral; we’ve got children who’ve got intellectual disability, autism and physical disability in addition to their deafness; and we’ve got students who’ve got very fluent Auslan skills and children whose Auslan is not so fluent. So we’ve really got that diversity of needs to meet on an individual level.

Art — both performance and visual art — was ‘a perfect additional medium for the children for communication’, Robyn suggested. ‘For them to have that as another string in their bow in their communication toolkit, is excellent.’
Robyn’s sentiments were reinforced by another teacher, who identified the varying levels of language proficiency as a major challenge in the education of the school’s students. For her, the project offered the possibility of providing another means of expression for children — particularly the younger ones — who had limited language ability.

>[The arts are important in schools] especially for kids that can’t express themselves particularly well. It’s another way of expressing yourself. Everyone needs to have some creative outlet. I’m hoping that for some of the kids that are struggling socially and emotionally, it might give them some output as well.

This issue of communication was, in turn, closely related back to the issue of confidence. The teacher quoted directly above drew attention to this when she spoke about students who were socially and emotionally struggling because of language delays. The difficulty in communicating — understanding and being understood — was something these students experienced as profoundly frustrating and demoralising. Other teachers similarly drew connections between the experience of communication delay and behavioural problems in the classrooms.

In describing the arts as a form of language and expression which could contribute to the communication abilities and confidence levels of the students, the teachers at Furlong Park demonstrated a positive, and quite progressive, understanding of the role and potential of creativity in education and childhood learning.

**Strengthening the place of art within the school environment**

For some of them, art was positioned in contrast to the more structured nature of literacy and numeracy education. One teacher described her hopes for the project as being something which would give the students time to be creative,

>... because really with literacy and numeracy, everything is very structured and it’s always very aimed at that. To be free, to let the mind wander a little bit, to think ‘oh, that’s an idea, I have it’, that would be wonderful to allow them to do art or drawing or filming or puppetry, all different things, anything that’s creative — I think that would be really, really good. It would be great for them.

Another described what she saw as the undervaluing of art in relation to literacy and numeracy, where the art program is what’s used to fill in time so that teachers can take their APT [administration and planning time]. Two more teachers drew attention to the fact that the school had not had a specialised arts teacher since the end of the previous year, and voiced a sense of loss and disappointment in regards to that.
Ambiguous understandings of creativity

Here, however, we start to get clues to a couple of points of ambiguity in the ways that creativity and the arts are understood. On the one hand, we can start to see the arts and creativity as something which is valued, at least rhetorically and by the teachers as individuals, but which is also relegated to a secondary status beneath literacy and numeracy training, particularly within the structures and institutional culture of the education system. At the same time, and related to this, there are signs of a tension between an understanding of creativity as an innate human characteristic, and creativity as expertise.

As is clear in the previous section, Polyglot as an arts company, and the artists involved with them, start from a strongly-held position in the innate creativity of people, and particularly children. In important ways, this understanding was shared by many of the teachers, and is evident when teachers talk about their hopes that the project will increase their students’ confidence in their own creative capacity. We see this, for instance, in the words of the Deaf teacher quoted above, who stated that ‘Deaf people are very creative, they always love to draw and express themselves … I’m trying to encourage [the students] to be more confident in their making of things, and their ideas’. Likewise, Robyn talked about the enormous potential she saw for the kids’ interest in the arts.

At the same time, however, the absence of a specialised art teacher is seen by the teachers to represent the loss of opportunity for the students to be involved in creative and artistic opportunity. This is particularly evident in the statement of one teacher, who said that ‘the creative arts just haven’t been a real priority this year because we don’t have an arts specialist’. One other teacher was cautiously positive about teachers in the school ‘picking up the mantle’ and incorporating art within their own classes, but she also commented that with the loss of the dedicated art teacher, there was ‘no-one else with that expertise’. Consider, however, the contrast between this description of the loss of an art teacher as a ‘loss of expertise’, and Polyglot’s own description of children ‘as experts in creative thinking’.

Another teacher commented that she didn’t see herself ‘as a creative person’, and suspected that other staff felt similarly. ‘I don’t think that many of the staff here have many of the creative skills themselves’, she said, ‘so I’m hoping that these people come in and have much more of an idea of how to bring that out of the kids’. Of course, the loss of a dedicated arts teacher at the school is a real loss, but the point to be made is while artistic skills are enormously important, creativity itself is much more than a skill set. Polyglot as an organisation, and its artists as individuals, do bring considerable expertise, but they also work within a philosophy that recognises, firstly, that expertise is not a precondition for creative expression, and, secondly, that expertise itself can be understood in a multiplicity of ways – i.e. ‘children as experts’.

Amongst the teachers, this understanding of creative and artistic expression — as contingent on skill acquisition and expertise — came across particularly in relation to a discussion around the involvement of special needs children in the program. One teacher, commenting on her hopes for these children participating in the project, said that she hoped to see her kids getting enjoyment out of the process, and looking forward to it. ‘Certainly I
wouldn’t want them to produce something artistic, or anything like that; it would just be an emotional thing for me.’ It was clear in this conversation that the teacher was concerned with ensuring that her students were equally involved in the project, and not excluded by the pressures of unrealistic expectations on them to achieve particular tangible outcomes. Indeed, her positive emphasis on process as more important than output, is something which aligns strongly with Polyglot’s own philosophy; however the statement also conveys an understanding of art and artistic creation as something outside the capacities or realm of experience of these particular children.

Understanding creativity as a set of skills or an area of expertise meant that many of the staff also positioned creativity as something outside their own frame of experience or ability. On a positive note, however, the teacher quoted a couple of paragraphs above, who described herself as not being a creative person, also voiced a hope that this ‘might change’. ‘Hopefully’, she said, ‘it’s not just the kids who’ll benefit out of the program’.

Other hopes and expectations for the project

Beyond the primary emphases on creativity, communication and confidence, a number of other potential benefits of the residency were also identified by teachers in their interviews. Four teachers drew attention to the possibility for increased sociality amongst their students, identifying this as a much hoped-for benefit of the project. Some emphasised their hope that students would be encouraged to socialise more with other children outside their immediate friendship groups, while others stressed the benefit of their exposure to new and different people, i.e. the incoming artists themselves.

Other positive outcomes which were identified by the teachers as desirable, included that the children enjoy it and have fun (this was particularly important for one of the teachers working closely with the students with additional needs). Two people expressed a hope that teachers be actively involved in the experience and learn from it as well. One teacher said that she hoped the residency would produce some sort of concrete outcome that the students could ‘look back on’, while another said that she expected a final outcome of some sort would be a part of the process. A couple of the teachers were aware that the project involved an exchange with a Deaf arts group in Cambodia. One teacher expressed enthusiasm about the opportunities for cross-cultural learning, saying

I know that it will be linked with a Cambodian school, with students in Cambodia. I think that’s a wonderful opportunity for the students to be involved with them, in another country, because it’s different culturally, different communities and societies; their lives are different.

Generally, however, this was not an aspect of the project that many people commented on.

It is worth noting that while most of the teachers were quite visibly enthusiastic about the residency, and talked at length about what they hoped it would achieve, many of them expressed a sense of uncertainty about what the
project would actually involve. Teachers knew that the project involved people coming in to the school from outside, and most mentioned that the project would involve a range of art forms. One had heard an early idea to draw inspiration from cartoons, while a couple mentioned that the project had ‘something to do with puppets’. As mentioned above, two teachers knew that the project involved a connection with Cambodia in some way. On the whole, this uncertainty was not expressed as something overwhelmingly negative, although it seemed to be a slight concern. Where some of the teachers did seem more worried or concerned was around not knowing how they themselves were to be involved. One said that she understood she would be involved with her grade, attending sessions and helping out, ‘but how much input I’ll have, I really don’t know’. Her feeling of uncertainty was echoed by others.

Finally, when asked to identify any issues or dynamics which might potentially emerge through the process, a number of responses were given. Two of the teachers mentioned the potential for behavioural problems to play out in the sessions, including acts of anger and lashing out, especially if students felt frustrated by a sense of their own inability to do things. Another teacher pointed to a tendency towards competitiveness as a dynamic between the children. One fear that was voiced was that ‘it would be really easy to overlook the kids who have additional needs’. Also related to the notion of inclusivity, one the teachers — herself Deaf — drew attention to the importance of having people with strong Auslan skills, ‘to make sure that the signing Deaf are really involved, and equal with the lip-reading dead and the oral Deaf.’ Likewise, when the principal commented on the diversity of language levels and needs within the school population, she noted that ‘to try and pull that together collectively for one project, that will be a real challenge.’ ‘But’, she added, ‘I think it’s there to be met.’
THROUGH THE MIDDLE AND AT THE TAIL END: REFLECTIONS

A number of evaluative processes and methods were used to garner an understanding of how participants felt about the project as it was occurring and at its completion, and to allow for a comparison with the stated aims, hopes and expectations which had been articulated at the commencement of the two terms. Two full days of participant observation took place, with the researchers attending a Polyglot session in both terms three and four. In addition, they were present at the final outcome. Another evaluation session took place two weeks after the main performance, and two days before the second showing timed to coincide with a visit from federal minister the Hon. Peter Garret to the school, when a series of interviews were conducted with both teachers and students at Furlong Park. At all these points of engagement within the school environment, participant observation was used as a means of generating insights and understandings. Similarly, this was the case with the artists, both in the context of the school environment, and outside it. Interviews with two of the casually-engaged artists took place in around the middle of the residency, and informal conversations in person and via email with other artists and Polyglot staff occurred throughout. As part of the project, artists involved in each session wrote a report on that session — what had been done, how it went, who was involved, how they felt about it etc. — and these reports provided a rich source of reflections and information on the process.

The Students

First, though, the students. A total of 16 students were involved in the evaluative discussions, in 6 groups of either two or three students at a time. Of these, 9 were from the younger group, and 7 from the older group. There were 11 boys and 4 girls. All up, this amounted to close to half of the student population directly involved in the interviewing process. The discussions were set up to be informal and as relaxed as possible, and took place in a small room in between the multipurpose hall and the art room. The space had been used as part of the final show, and was still filled with props from the performance, television screens, handwritten signs and cardboard ‘houses’. We sat on the floor in the middle of the mess and colour. As well as the small groups of students, there was the interviewer Victoria Stead, the interpreter Lori (who the students know and are very comfortable with), and Trudy, the AV teacher at the school. The discussions were all under ten minutes in length, and were filmed by Trudy.

Student responses

Above all, the experience pointed to a positive and enjoyable engagement through the Polyglot residency. All of the small groups which were involved in the evaluation discussions was animated. In each group, students were able to respond directly to questions, to talk about what they enjoyed, and describe different activities they had...
been involved in. Significantly, all of them were enthusiastic and willing to do so. None of the students were instructed to take part in the evaluation discussions, but volunteered to do so when requests were made to the bigger group.

There was a wide range of levels of language ability amongst the students who took part in the evaluation exercise, but in each of the groups students were able to respond clearly (and often quite animatedly!) to questions such as, ‘what did you like about the Polyglot sessions?’, and ‘can you tell me what your favourite part / thing to do was?’ Some of the responses given, included:

‘I liked the puppets, and drawing the shows and doing the theatre stuff, making the houses, the fireplaces — all that fun stuff!’

‘My favourite was when we made the puppets with the shadows. I liked that.’

‘My favourite was the games. Because we’d use the newspapers in our pants as tails, and have to try and pinch them [from each other]!’

Other students — indeed, most of them — responded positively but in ways that are not necessarily conducive to transcribing as succinct quotes or text grabs. This is partly because of the language and communication delays which many experience, partly because of their strong use of gesture and mime, and partly because, at the best of times, children rarely communicate in full sentences! Some of these responses are described below.

1.
One girl, talking about the Polyglot sessions, says ‘I was happy because the puppets were really good and we went outside and did the walking...’ Here, she gestures and re-enacts the Visual Vernacular performance which was rehearsed and filmed before being performed on the night. ‘Walking’ her fingers up her arm, the other girl taking part in the discussion jumps in, and the two are animated and excited, using gesture, sign and speech to talk about and re-enact the VV performance. Laughing, they jump into talking about the ‘fire game’, where the students would respond with different actions to commands of ‘fire’, ‘rain’, ‘flood’ and ‘sun’. The girls are so excited they are almost falling over each other to describe what they had done. ‘It was very fun’, the first girl concluded, ‘we were all laughing’.

2.
A group of three students from the younger class all have quite delayed language ability, and limited Auslan fluency. Asked what they enjoyed about the Polyglot sessions, they reply the puppets, and making the paper clothes. Using mime, some sign and gestural communication, one of them acts out parts of the experience she enjoyed, including the scene in the final show where all the students stood in a line and introduced themselves. ‘Hi’, she demonstrates, ‘my name is
and I like pineapples!’ Asked if that was her favourite part of the night, she grins and nodded. Asked how she felt about the show, she replies, ‘I felt good’.

3. Another group of three students from the younger class identify the paper costumes and the ‘fire game’ as some of their favourite things. They are asked, ‘Was the Polyglot project fun?’ and three heads nod vigorously in unison. One boy, sitting in the middle, has a cardboard guitar strapped around his neck, as if ready to break into song at any moment. He lets go for a moment while he re-enacts a part from the performance, ‘tap-tapping’ on a giant piece of people behind which the students were concealed, before making little holes just big enough for eyes to peer out of, then extending them to the size of faces, then ‘rip, rip, RIPPING’ them down to reveal the kids behind and mark the start of the show. The interviewer asks what they are doing today, and is told ‘we’re making more costumes, out of paper and cardboard’. Asked why, the student clutching the cardboard guitar replies that there is another show on Friday [the next day]. ‘Cool. How are you feeling about Friday?’ they’re asked, ‘are you excited?’ Heads bound up and down again, with big grins stretched across faces. The budding guitar virtuoso calls out, ‘yay! I’m excited!’

4. The two girls from the older group continue describing what they enjoyed about the Polyglot sessions and the performance night in particular. Gesturing around to the room where the discussion is taking place, which was where the ‘A Day in the Life of Kampot’, and ‘A Day in Furlong Park’ videos were screened on the night, one of them says, ‘I like it when the parents came. I like watching the people in here where we put the TV on. The lights were on in here, and all the people’, Then, looking at the two television sets, she asks, ‘why are there two TVs?’ The other girl looks around and then signs ‘oh, I know, I know, because the Kampot video was in there, and ours showed the opposite — you could see the differences in the two places. They were walking and were on buses, and they showed the different ways … In Furlong Park we’ve got the buses that bring us to school, but in Kampot they don’t have any, so they walk.’ ‘Or they have bikes’, the first student adds, ‘they use their bikes a lot’.

Enjoyment, and positive communication

These and other instances of response show a number of positive aspects of the students’ experience of the Extended School Residency program. In the first instance, and importantly, the project was one the students evidently enjoyed. All the students responded positively when asked if they had enjoyed the Polyglot sessions, and their facial expressions, body language and the animation of their communication reinforced these replies. All of them were able to talk about the experience, identify aspects of it they had enjoyed, and describe what they did. Without claiming this as solely attributable to the Polyglot experience, it is positive that they were able to communicate clearly, respond directly to questions, and engage in conversation about the process. Again, their
answers and behaviour in the discussions suggest that the students were closely engaged with and by the Polylgot sessions.

In terms of particular activities and aspects of the creative process, puppets were particularly popular, with the making of shadow puppets identified by many of the students as a ‘favourite’ or otherwise favoured part of the Polylgot residency. Similarly, the ‘fire game’ got a number of mentions, as did the games with the large balls made of newspaper and masking tape. Most of the older students who had been involved in the Visual Vernacular performance mentioned it as something they enjoyed, or else re-enacted their parts in it. With the younger group, the paper costumes were a favourite part of the project, and many also made mention of their involvement in the performance night, where they introduced themselves to the audience and named something they liked using Auslan.

**Reflections on behaviour**

Significantly, on two occasions students mentioned having learnt about being calm and not yelling. When one group of students was asked if there was anything they would have liked to be different about the project, one student replied that he had had to learn about being calm. If he had to improve anything about the project, he said, it would be to not yell from the beginning. This prompted a discussion amongst the three students about their behaviour during the VV. It was really difficult, they said, getting the lines right and staying in position during the activity. The student who had raised the point about calmness gestured to the others and said, ‘that’s why we think that if we had of been calmer it would have been easier’. Likewise, on another occasion, a student (this time from the younger class) described being calm and behaving well, or else not being able to continue participating in the sessions. It is notable that these students were able to reflect on and articulate insights into their own behaviour, in the context of their involvement in the residency.

**The performance**

The performance itself was evidently an important and valued part of the students’ experience. When asked about how it made them feel, the general response was that it made them feel good and happy. While some of them were nervous beforehand, they also found it fun and enjoyable. Significantly, the presence of family was an important thing for many of the students. A number of them described positively the experience of having family present, or else more generally having people attending the school for the performance. A couple of the students who had not had family there expressed this as something they felt sad or unhappy about, but were still able to talk positively about the experience as a whole. One girl humorously described her mother’s response to the ‘One Day In...’ videos:
All the families came and watched the Cambodia video, and then the Furlong Park video, and the parents were all laughing and laughing ... My mum loved it. She kept laughing. She laughed too much! I was like, 'calm down!' [laughs]

A conversation between two students, both boys from the older group, describes quite articulately their sense of pride and excitement at being involved in the show. The response of one of the boys particularly — and his facial and body language while responding — conveys a sense of the real happiness which was felt at having his family present.

Interviewer: How did you feel about the performance? Did it make you happy? Nervous?
Student 1: The concert was exciting
Student 2: [I was] excited when the parents came in that secret room [pointing to the small room next door where some of the students were doing activities with visitors to the show]. But one thing — I was nervous, at the start when we did the dancing [opening performance with the paper]. I was nervous.
Interviewer: At the end of the performance, then how did you feel? Did you still feel nervous?
Student 2: I feel happy [smiles]
Student 1: I feel excited!
Student 2: And proud of myself
Interviewer: You should be! Did your family come? [Both nod]
Student 2: Yep. My mum, and sister and my dad.
Interviewer: And you? [To other student]
Student 1: Uh huh. My mum, and my two cousins...
Interviewer: What did they think?
Student 2: I asked them what did they think, and they said 'it was really, really good and we are very proud of you' [beaming]

The Teachers

Six teachers were interviewed during the evaluation exercise at the end of term four, including the principal Robyn. Two of these teachers were deaf, and the rest were hearing. Some were amongst those who had been interviewed in the initial evaluation exercise at the beginning of the project, but others had not been. Using a semi-structured interviewing style, the teachers were asked broad, open-ended questions, beginning with how they felt about the project and how it had gone over the two terms. They were asked what they felt could be done better or differently. Other questions emerged in response to the particularities of the teachers’ responses and comments.
Enjoyment of the students

Overwhelmingly, the teachers who were interviewed felt that the project had been beneficial for the students, and hugely enjoyed by them. As one teacher put it, 'Well obviously the kids loved it'. And from another, 'We could tell that the kids were enjoying it because every Tuesday, they were like “Polyglot, wow!”' Similarly, teachers were positive and enthusiastic about the performance and final outcome. Some of the comments which they made about the night included:

'The final performance was terrific and the kids were pleased with it, but there was a lot of good parent feedback too.'

'The end product was just wonderful'

'I really enjoyed the performance. I was really happy with it and I thought the whole thing was really successful. It was just so creative!'

'I was buzzing afterwards, I was just so excited!'

Confidence and creativity

The teachers were asked to expand more on what they felt was positive and beneficial about both the performance night, and the process more broadly. In response, many of the teachers commented that they had watched the confidence and creativity of the children — and their confidence in their creative expression — grow through the process of the residency. This was particularly positive feedback, as an increase in confidence was widely cited as a primary hoped for benefit when teachers were interviewed at the start of the project. One teacher described how rewarding it had been to see the ways that the children had ‘taken on’ the project, and grown in their confidence and imagination. Another identified positive outcomes of the project being the increased creativity and engagement of the students with what was going on around them, and with each other:

The children, at the end of the Polyglot sessions, were a lot more creative. At the start of the year, they lacked a bit of confidence, and then at the end, it was just amazing — they can draw, they can do everything, they’re a lot more confident.

Another teacher noted that at the start of the project, some of the students seemed lacking in confidence, and a little confused by the new people and the process. But, she noted, at the end of it they were engaging confidently, had developed new skills and had experience with new crafts and practices. For a number of these teachers, a key dimension of the increase in confidence and creativity of their students was reflected in the ways they interacted with each other. Two teachers made mention of the ways that the students had been drawing on each other’s ideas, and giving each other feedback. Others were pleased and proud of the ways the students had
worked and socialised with other students outside their own age groups and classes. One, particularly, noted the positive and encouraging ways that the older kids had worked with the younger children on the night of the performance.

Connected to this, a number of the teachers specifically identified as a point of strength the fact that the children were encouraged to lead the creative process themselves. One described this as the ‘philosophy’ of the project — letting the children be themselves and be creative. Another commented similarly about the performance: ‘I like that it was the kids’ work, not the teachers giving them ideas’. For this teacher, she appreciated that the work reflected the kids and the ways that they create — not polished and perfect, but rough, in-process and organic.

*Strengthening the students’ communication skills*

For some of the teachers, another strength of the project was its benefits for the students’ communicative skills and experience. One, a Deaf person herself, commented that her students were using more facial expression, and had a greater understanding of how to use their body language more in communicating. Their signing had improved, too, and in part she attributed this to the students’ exposure to lots of different fluent Auslan users whose language they could model their own on. Her comments were echoed by Robyn, the school principal, who talked enthusiastically about the Visual Vernacular exercises done with the students. She noted that as children learn ‘proper’ signs, they often lose or stop fully utilising the use of gesture and mime. The VV was useful in teaching them that gesture and mime still have an important place in communication, and she commented that clarity of the students’ communication had really benefited from the project.

*Challenging teacher expectations*

In commenting on what they felt to be the benefits of the project, some of the teachers admitted that they were surprised at what had worked. Their comments suggest interesting questions about how the process and practice of Polyglot stood in contrast to the processes and practices of the school environment. This is a theme we comment on in this section, and also explore further in the subsequent section. One teacher, for example, commented that she was surprised with the way the different ‘bits and pieces’ of the project came together in the final show:

> I think we were all very concerned that it wasn’t going to come off, but what happened on the night was just amazing and worked really, really well. So it was a really pleasant surprise for all of us, that it worked so well, and that the kids were getting so much out of it.

Similarly, Robyn said that on the day of the show, when things were being set up, ‘I thought, “they’re never gonna get this done”, and they [the artists] would say, “oh it’ll be fine”, and it was!’ At the same time, however, she was
not surprised by what the kids were able to do, because, in her words, ‘I always had faith that it was going to happen’.

In this regards, however, Robyn was perhaps different to some of the other teachers in the school. She noted herself that a number of the teachers had been expressing doubts about the project, insisting that the kids couldn’t do it: ‘many of them were saying, our kids aren’t going to be able to do this, they need more structure’. From Robyn’s perspective, however, ‘the kids proved them wrong’. She commented powerfully in the interview that,

One of the things that I think is just so important, that we’ve all learnt, is never, ever to pre-judge the kids in what they might be able to achieve, because they’ve shown us that they can do far more than we thought they might be able to do.

Challenges in the relationship between teachers and artists

Robyn’s comments here about the perceptions around structure point to a gap which was present at different times between the ideas, assumptions and opinions of the teachers at Furlong Park, and those of the artists associated with Polyglot. The dynamic between teachers and artists was, as she put it in her speech at the performance, often challenging. Indeed, it was raised in different ways by all of the teachers interviewed. One described the teachers’ experience of the project as often ‘frustrating’, and this was a sentiment echoed by others. In describing what was challenging about the experience, teachers described feeling at times as if they were not been listened to or included. Feelings of frustration seemed to emerge particularly around questions of teacher intervention and discipline in response to student behavioural issues. Where the artists saw themselves as offering teachers an opportunity to step out of their role and be free to participate in the process like the students, the experience of some of the teachers (at some times) was of being limited and curtailed. The comment of one teacher — ‘I just think we just should have been allowed to be teachers’ — is quite illustrative in this regard. Without a doubt, the relationship between teachers and artists emerged as one of the key issues in the experience of the project by both groups, and particularly by the teachers. Scratching the surface of it quickly reveals that the project involved the intersection of some quite fundamentally different understandings and practices, including perceptions of creativity, organisational structures and approaches, approaches to education and learning, and understandings of the role of play.

While the vast majority of teachers spoken to about the project were positive and enthusiastic about its benefits for the students, there were a couple of comments which pointed to ambivalence in the way that the process of the project was valued and understood. In this vein, one teacher commented that while her students clearly enjoyed the process, she was not sure what they got out of it. This teacher, however, did go on to talk about the increased confidence and imagination of the kids, which can presumably be considered beneficial outcomes. One other teacher interviewed was particularly critical of the process. For her, the children were being led in activities which were ‘fun’ for them, but otherwise of no value. This teacher was talking specifically about the
special needs students at the school, and the critiques she makes are taken up in much more detail in the next section, which considers in more detail at the engagement of the Swans students. Still, outside the particular context of the students with additional needs, her comments also point to diverging understandings the role of play and free expression in the learning process, which are quite closely connected to issues to do with teaching practices, the importance of structure, and ways of engaging with students.

Without overly pre-empting the discussions in the next session, it’s worth noting here that challenge is itself not necessarily a negative experience, and can in fact be a very constructive one if people come out of a process with new insights into their own practices and ideas. In this vein, it is positive to hear one of the teachers comment, ‘I really wanted to interfere in the beginning, but I had to learn to step back’. Another noted that she had been making shadow puppets with her students, and using some of the techniques and activities from the Polyglot sessions in teaching literacy, ‘taking some of those lessons back to the classroom’. Indeed, as Robyn pointed to in her comment quoted above, the Polyglot residency effectively shook up and expanded the teachers’ own sense of what their students were capable of. This is perhaps the best kind of challenge, but the task now is to think about how that challenge can be made as positive and constructive an experience as possible.

The Artists

Throughout the period of the residency, the comments and feedback of the artists paint a picture of a genuine and enthusiastic engagement with the Furlong Park School and its students. After the first workshop, Jodee commented to the other artists and teachers, ‘last week was brilliant and we all had a ball...we learnt a lot in the first day and were inspired and overwhelmed by the kid’s freedom of creativity … they are oozing it.’ Across both terms, the comments and reflections pointed to a positive and rewarding experience for them as well as the students.

Child-led creative development

In both the artists’ behaviour and in their reflections on the project, a strong emphasis on child-led creative development was evident throughout the process. At the end of the summary of ideas from each weekly session, for instance, the lead artist recorded creative ideas which might be carried forward. These were ideas and influences drawn directly from the students’ actions, imaginings, and responses to each section. Each week through the first term of the residency, new ideas would be added to those already recorded, building an ever-growing list of ideas, inspirations, thoughts, activities, plans, schemes and potential happenings. Examples of entries include:

- An unseen scene under the table — shadows, voices, grunts, quivers — no one knows what is going on but everyone wants to peek [workshop one]

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26 Jodee, email to Polyglot artists and school staff, 20 July 2009.
• Mask work, face painting, shadow play, putting your hands through someone’s arms where they do the
facial expressions and you sign [workshop two]
• Developing spaces like tunnels, slides, peeking holes, cubby houses, rolling and climbing [workshop two]
• An emotion wall where the kids stick their heads through and all perform the same expression
[workshop three]
• Continue developing the boxes and see what ideas emerge [workshop three]
• The audience to peer through ripped paper screens and see parts of a show or someone’s limbs
[workshop four]
• Bring balloons for the third group [the Students With Additional Needs] so they can feel the vibrations
from the drums [workshop five]

Many of these ideas (and others) recorded in the session notes each week became an important part of the future
sessions, and of the final outcome showing at the end of term four. For instance, the idea of a tunnel became a
reality when the main corridor of the school was transformed into a tunnel, with hidden panels and windows
behind which students were partially concealed or performing with puppets (again, drawing on some of the
ideas which emerged from the students). Likewise, the use of newspaper and masking tape emerged out of the
process of the sessions, as the students responded excitedly and imaginatively to these materials. As a result,
they became a central part of the creative process. Huge balls made from newspaper wrapped with masking tape
became recurring motif through the sessions, and games which were offered and suggested from students and
teachers were taken up. For example, the ‘bowling ball’ game, where people pretended to be skittles while one
person used a giant newspaper ball to ‘bowl them down’, was suggested by a participant in one of the sessions
with the older group, and became a favourite activity of the students. During the final outcome, this creative
taking up of newspaper and tape was reflected in the set up of the school, particularly the arts room which was
given over to newspaper and tape creations, to which parents and visitors were invited to contribute.

Reflexive self-evaluation processes

At times the artists made mention of ideas that hadn’t worked the way they hoped they would, or activities
which they had not run with children before and which needed to be abandoned or modified. The regular session
summaries proved a useful space for reflecting on these experiences, and making notes of suggestions and
learnings. For example, Anna wrote about a story-telling exercise which involved the kids using physical
performance and gesture:

We continued with the storytelling until the end of the workshop. On reflection on this, I wish I
had thought to ask the kids for their feedback on each other’s stories, whether they understood
them, what they liked about it, what they didn’t like about it. Oh well, I will remember this for next
time!27

27 Anna, Summary of Events, workshop seven, 1 September 2009.
And in another session summary, Jodee wrote:

Our approach with the younger ones changed as Jodee felt unsure about teaching mime to them... so she began with chaezy-tale and the kids played this ... then they formed a circle and Jodee tried to introduce the idea of a VV game, where all the kids form a 'group lake' with their hands and then one by one, pass a sea creature made with the hands. Jodee had never tried this with the kids before and it felt like it wasn’t working, so then Jodee asked the kids to do it with their whole body and move around the room ... well, that worked well ... the kids became crocodiles, sharks, jelly fish, you name it, it was there. They love animals!28

Challenges in communication and engagement of staff

The challenges of the project seemed greater for some artists than for others. Leonie, for instance, described a sense of difficulty and challenge around her communication with the students, specifically in relation to having limited Auslan skills: 'It feels like there is a barrier [between me and the students] ... I’m not sure if it’s something I’m putting up'. She articulated a sense of discomfort around the limitations of her own language and experience, and clearly felt much more comfortable communicating in English. She described, for instance, her anxiety on a day when she was due to go in to the school to run a session but then learnt that the other artist due to attend that day (who was both hearing and a native Auslan user) had to cancel. This sense of anxiety around language and communication — about being in an unfamiliar social and cultural space — presented a significant challenge to this artist’s experience of the project.

Leonie was engaged on a quite ad hoc basis throughout the residency, and it's possible that this intensified the extent to which she felt uncomfortable or precarious. Mark, who was also engaged on an ad hoc basis, similarly expressed some challenges in the process, although of a different nature to those Leonie mentioned. For him, the experience of the project, and particularly his engagement with the students, was positive — ‘this is their world, and it’s great to be engaged with them when they’re so excited’ — but he noted that he did not feel particularly connected to Polyglot as an organisation, and did not feel particularly engaged within any sense of the broader aims, purposes or vision of the project. ‘I don’t feel as though I’m being employed by Polyglot’, he noted. While acknowledging the important role that Jodee played in facilitating communication, Mark commented that it was difficult to know who to communicate with about different things, and about who was coordinating what parts of the project. One interpretation of both Mark and Leonie’s experience is that the high turnover of creative personnel created a potential for discontinuity and incoherence in the process, with artists not feeling particularly connected to the process or else perhaps not having an adequate level of support. Doubtless, this situation is exacerbated by a whole variety of external factors with which arts organisations have to contend – time pressures, often-inadequate and short-term project funding – but as undesirable as it may be, this is the reality in which arts organisations like Polyglot often have to operate, and systems of supporting staff need to hold up regardless.

Interactions with teachers

Across all the artists, a common sense of challenge was around the dynamics between teachers and artist (as, indeed, this was a common theme for the teachers). From very early in the project, the issue of communication between teachers and artists emerged as significant, with Jodee writing in an email to artists and teachers after the second workshop, that ‘a real learning curve for me was the importance of establishing clear working relations and feedback loops with the teachers’.29 Other artists, similarly, noted that this was an aspect of the project were the potential for tension was apparent. Particularly in informal conversations, a number of artists reaffirmed sentiments similar to those discussed in the ‘At the outset’ section above, including a critique of formal school structures which limit creative output, and conventional teaching and educational models which emphasise control, structure and the exercise of authority. However, a number of artists also recognised the importance of the teachers, and the value of the knowledge and experience they possessed. The challenge for them was often not so much ‘overcoming’ the presence of the teachers, as finding ways of working together that could be mutually informing and rewarding. So, for instance, we get comments like these:

‘It would be great to set up a strategy so we can have a great flowing relationship between everyone so we can all share expertise and learn from each other. Will be interesting to note what the teachers feel and say’30

‘Mel, Leonie and Jodee attended the staff meeting on the 4th August. The teachers were great. They said they really liked how we briefed them quickly before each session on what was happening … Artists and teachers agree that communicating is the best way to keep the lines open. All very happy with the process and will continue to keep giving feedback. Jodee and artists will attend staff meeting for half an hour every few weeks.’31

A number of the artists commented particularly favourably and enthusiastically about the involvement of the school principal Robyn. Their comments point to her playing an important role as a kind of cultural translator, or bridge between the teachers and the artists. This is something that was valued by the artists, and clearly made the process of engagement easier and more rewarding from their point of view.

In the next section we discuss the issue of teacher-artist dynamics in more detail, as well as some other key issues and dynamics in the project.

29 Jodee, email to Polyglot artists and school staff, 24 July 2009.
30 Jodee, Summary of Events, workshop two, 21 July 2009
31 Jodee, Summary of Events, workshop three, 4 August 2009
3. KEY ISSUES AND DYNAMICS
DYNAMICS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND ARTISTS

The relationships between teachers and artists during the Extended School Residency were one of the more challenging dimensions of the project, particularly for teachers at the school. It’s important, though, not to overstate the level of tension. On the one hand, teachers consistently spoke positively and enthusiastically about the process of the residency. And on the other, the experience of coming into contact with different perspectives, ideas and practices seems to have been a genuinely fruitful learning experience. The sense which the teachers give is of very much having gone through a journey over the course of the residency. As one put it, ‘everyone gained something from it, and everybody learnt something from it’. Nevertheless, it’s worth looking more closely at what made the experience challenging, and what could be done to make it more constructive in the future.

From the outset, teachers were asked ‘not to be teachers, but to be participants in the process along with their students. As the teacher interviews in the previous section, ‘At the Outset’, make clear, there were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it was indicative of an approach to learning and creativity that emphasised the creative ‘expertise’ of children (rather than adults), and sought to move away from an educational model of institutional authority structures, towards one which emphasised children-led processes. Secondly Polyglot hoped that freeing teachers up to participate in the project would allow them to see their students in a new light, gain new insights and skills which could inform their own teaching.

Asking teachers not to be teachers

For some of the teachers, though, this was experienced not as a liberating opportunity, but as a challenge which came close to threatening their role in the school environment, and moreover left them at times confused and unclear about what they should be doing. What was particularly difficult was being asked to not intervene when children were acting in a way that they believed was inappropriate. Early in the residency, a piece of butcher's paper was left in the staff room for teachers to write feedback on the project. One comment read, ‘Love being able to join in as a participant but my role as a teacher demands that I interfere at times’, and this had two extra ticks beside it. Similarly in the interviews, one teacher noted that the one thing that was difficult about the process was that ‘being in the role of the teacher, it was really hard to just stand back and let the kids do what they wanted.’ She went on to explain that,

There were sometimes I felt I could not pull some children back, especially when I have a lot of the boys [in my class] and they muck up all the time in the classroom, and they just got worse sometimes, with their behaviour [after the Polyglot sessions]

This sentiment was echoed by another teacher,
I think a lot of the teachers in the junior school found it very frustrating because we didn’t feel, I guess, particularly included in the whole thing. We kept getting told to ‘back off, back off, back off’, and that is really hard when you’ve got to then take the kids back to the classroom and do work with them.

For these staff members, being a teacher is not a role they can simply step out of for an hour or two, particularly when, for them, the Polyglot sessions sit within a broader context of classes, curriculum and educational processes. On the one hand, this is not an unreasonable critique, and within the institutional space of the school (and where teachers carry a strong sense of responsibility and a duty of care), it may have been unreasonable to ask them to ‘not be teachers’. Likewise, several teachers described feeling as if their knowledge of the children, their behaviours and needs was not as respected or valued as it could have been. As one put it, some of the kids needed to engaged with in particular ways, and ‘sometimes we weren’t listened to with that side of things, and it did get a little bit stressful for us.’ Another commented,

I think that people felt that when they did step in to help — especially if there was a behaviour problem or if someone was not participating the way they should, or not watching — we felt like we were getting in trouble. We felt like one of the kids, you know, like [we were being told] ‘you’re being naughty’, don’t do that.

Student behaviour

Certainly, there were some instances where artists struggled to cope with student behaviour, and it’s possible that having access to some of the staff’s knowledge of the students could have provided valuable insights. And, generally, it is true that teachers at the school had a wealth of knowledge about, and experience with their students, which Polyglot staff and artists did not have as outsiders coming into the school environment. For example, teachers’ experience with their students gives them a good sense of when students aren’t comprehending instructions fully, or need further clarification and explanation, particularly in the context of students with language delay. Knowledge such as this is a valuable resource that could have perhaps been better tapped into, and in doing so made the teachers feel more valued and respected in the creative process.

On the other hand, though, it was clear through participant observation of the Polyglot sessions that some of the teachers were approaching some situations with responses and judgements that were quite antithetical to the approaches which Polyglot were trying to nurture. For instance, some of the behaviours which teachers wanted to intervene to stop or limit — noise, yelling, running, kids ‘doing their own thing’ or ‘not following instructions’ — are in fact important dimensions of an approach which employs a philosophy of child-led creativity, openness and improvisation.
Different models of engaging students

Likewise, the artists’ emphasis on teaching that ‘there is no right or wrong’ in creative processes, sometimes came into collision with some teachers’ ideas about doing things ‘the right way’. For example, on one occasion students were being taught how to make ‘pop ups’, which involves making cuts into the fold of a folded over piece of paper, which is then opened and inverted so a shape sticks out (as in a pop-up book). The kids were all very engaged in the process, but some were following Sue’s example more easily than others. The first shape Sue made was a basic square, where two parallel cuts are made perpendicular to the fold. One child, sitting away from Sue on the other side of the circle, made three cuts instead of two. The response of the teacher nearby was to take the card from him and say ‘No, you’ve done it wrong, start again’ and hand him another piece of card. In contrast, when a similar thing occurred at the side of the circle closer to Sue, and a girl looked up at her holding a piece of folded paper with cuts all along it (seemingly mystified as to why it wasn’t making a square), Sue’s response was to say ‘wow, three cuts. I wonder what sort of shapes they’ll make? What if you had even more cuts?’ and encourage the student to keep exploring. To use language associated with improvisational theatre, what Sue did was to take an offer from the child and build on it. What the teacher did in this instance was to block that offer, and in doing so curtail that creative process of exploration.

Positive challenges and learning experiences

The teachers are playing alongside children, trusting the process and us a lot more and are seeing kids do things differently or for the first time.32

Similarly, while teachers felt that their knowledge of the children, and their particular behavioural issues and needs, was not being listened to, it is also true that the ways the students behaved through the residency, and the things they were able to do and achieve (in terms of processes as well as finished products) in some ways confounded and exceeded some of the expectations which were held by teachers. While a number of teachers were predicting major behavioural problems — emphasising the short attention spans of the students, and the way some need to be closely watched — the reality was that, for the most part, the students responded well to the sessions. The ‘lack of structure’ did not create the widespread crises which were anticipated by some teachers, because the absence of the sort of formal structures which teachers are often used to working with — curricula, set lesson plans etc. — does not mean that there is no skill involved in the running of those sessions, or that artists are not employing particular techniques and tools, or that there has been no preparation or thoughtful consideration given to the sessions beforehand. In short, there is method in the madness.

Perhaps the best learning experience for the teachers, then, was to actually see the process working, and see what it was able to achieve — the proof, if you like. Robyn’s comment about the students, quoted previously in

32 Sue, Summary of Events, 20 October 2009
this report — ‘they’ve shown us they can do far more than we thought they might be able to do’ — is illustrative in this regards. So too is the number of staff who were surprised, albeit pleasantly so, at how well things came together for the final performance. This was one of the most positive outcomes of the residency — its ability to take both students and teachers out of their normal patterns of behaviour, and in doing to allow them to see themselves and their environment in a totally different light, to see new potentials and possibilities, skills and strengths they did not know they had.

Moving forward

So, then, which way forward? Rather than asking teachers ‘not to be teachers’, a more fruitful approach might be to articulate the engagement of artists and teachers through the residency as a process of exploring different ways of teaching and of being a teacher. Our suggestion for how this might be done is to put more emphasis on the exchange between artists and teachers in its own right, rather than as a subsidiary or secondary dimension of the engagement with the students. One or two workshops run specifically with and for the teachers prior to the commencement of workshops with the students, could serve a number of purposes:

• Teachers could brief artists on the students in their classes — names, family backgrounds, particular learning needs etc. — and share their experiences of teaching them. The artists would not necessarily have to take on the same sense of the children’s capabilities and limitations, but would still benefit from the knowledge and experience of the teachers. The teachers, in turn, could feel as if that knowledge and experience was being valued and listened to.

• Introducing teachers to some of the techniques, ideas and philosophies associated with Polyglot’s creative practice. This could be done through running practical activities (impro, theatre, mime, puppetry etc.) with the teachers, but also through actually teaching and explaining key aspects of the approach, and some of the pedagogical ideas underpinning them. This would have the dual benefit of giving teachers new skills which could be taken back into the classroom after the residency was completed, as well as making the teachers familiar with what was going to occur so that they could recognise and appreciate what the artists were doing when they were doing it (e.g. accepting and building on creative offers rather than blocking them), and also feel more included and able to participate.

• This might be able to done in such a way that it counted ‘officially’ towards staff development requirements

• Scenarios workshops with teachers and artists in small groups could start the process of building relationships between the two groups (outside the immediacy of the classroom, where teachers are likely to become more defensive if they feel like their professional toes are being stepped on) as well as mutual understanding. Different scenarios could be presented — e.g. a child yelling inside the classroom, two students fighting over the use of a crayon, needing to develop a creative piece of work for presentation, a student with profoundly delayed language ability, students making three cuts in a pop-up instead of two, etc. — with teachers and artists talking about how they would respond to those
scenarios, why, and what they would be hoping to achieve. The point here is not to prove either group right or wrong, but to enable a genuine exchange of skills and experience, and develop a genuine empathy for where each other is positioned.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: That Polyglot run one or two workshop sessions with teachers, prior to the commencement of workshops with students, and that these be oriented towards sharing teaching skills, techniques and philosophies; sharing knowledge and experience; and building relationships and mutual trust and understanding between teachers and artists.

Another suggestion is that teachers be included (or offered the opportunity to be included) in the final outcome. Particularly toward the end of the second term, when sessions were largely oriented towards preparations for the final outcome, it was common to see the teachers sitting around, watching from the sidelines, visibly unsure of how they should be engaging and in some cases visibly frustrated. At the same time, the artists running the sessions were operating to a deadline, managing stress and in some cases looking frustrated themselves. Instances where teachers were intervening in a rehearsal, only to be told to step back / sit down and let the director do her job, seemed to be frustrating for everyone, and could perhaps have been avoided if those teachers were themselves involved in their own contribution to the night, be that a performance of some type, making a visual installation, or otherwise facilitating some aspect of the event. This was also ensure that the teachers were benefiting from the creative process as well.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: That consideration be given to including the teachers in the final outcome in some creative capacity.
ENGAGEMENT OF THE SWANS — STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

The engagement of the Students with additional needs was something that was commented on by a number of people in quite different ways. Throughout the evaluation process, some quite divergent views were aired about the process and the quality of engagement with the Swans.

Critique of the engagement of the Swans

One of the teachers interviewed in the final stage evaluation session, in particular, was very critical of the process of engagement with the Swans, and exploring her critiques is a useful way of thinking through issues relating to this part of the project. The teacher’s primary objection to the project was that some of the activities were ‘not appropriate’. Asked to expand on this, she gave the example of one child who really enjoyed wrapping himself in masking tape, and who often did this during the Polyglot sessions with the Swans students. ‘Sure, he enjoys it’, she said ‘but he also enjoys stuffing things down the toilet’. The activities they were doing, she suggested, were ‘fun’ but had no benefit. Indeed, they were teaching the students ‘bad behaviours’ that will ‘take years to un-teach’. Pushed again to expand on what she meant by ‘bad behaviour’ and ‘inappropriate’, the teacher suggested that the behaviours were bad and inappropriate because the kids will try and replicate them elsewhere without understanding why it’s not acceptable to do so (e.g. the masking tape).

This teacher gave an example of one Polyglot session where students were encouraged to draw on each other’s work.

That caused tremendous problems in my room – huge problems, huge aggression from him [one of the students] because he believed he was able to just grab the other kids’ work and scribble all over it. The first time he did it I was really shocked, because I’d never seen that sort of behaviour, and then someone said to me ‘oh that’s what we did in Polyglot yesterday’.

The Polyglot artists, the teacher said, ‘just need to be aware that it’s not like treating a normal child. There are things you can do with a normal child that you just cannot do with a child who is autistic and developmentally delayed.’ At the same time, and somewhat contradictorily, she critiqued the project for not including the Swans students ‘at exactly the same level’ as the other students. She also suggested that it would have been beneficial for Polyglot to have time getting to know the students and learning names, and she was critical of the high turnover of staff, noting that kids with profound additional needs take time to build relationships with people.
Limitations of this critique

There are a number of critiques here, and it's worth breaking them down. To begin with, this teacher's perspective on the Extended School Residency has to be measured against the fact that she did not participate in any of the sessions herself, and was not present on the night of the performance. This does not invalidate her critiques, but it does qualify them somewhat. Particularly, her reading of the activities as fun, but without benefit or substance, does not hold up well. Polyglot's activities are, as has been discussed in much detail previously, anchored in an understanding of play and improvisation as creative, generative activities through which people learn to engage with and explore the world around them, which stimulate thinking and cognitive engagement, and which are social.

The value of play and creativity

Here, we can look back to some of the literature cited at the beginning of this report (‘Setting the Scene’). We can point, for instance, to the observations of creative and linguistic theorists who argue that improvisation is fundamentally central to all human communication, or anthropologists who have demonstrated the importance of ritual and performance to the experience of being human. Similarly, we might think about ways that play contributes to children's language and social development through story-telling, interpersonal interactions, and sensory exploration. Indeed, particularly because play and creative expression can be more difficult and inaccessible for children with autism and profound additional needs, activities and contexts which encourage play and sensory exploration in a social context have real value. Wendy Keay-Bright has argued that,

Underpinning play is interaction... Given that play skills have a central role in development and that these skills are underdeveloped in individuals with autism, integrating play activities into daily routines could offer significant opportunities for encouraging social interaction, communication and imaginative thinking.

We might also point to the fact that 'fun' is not in itself an unworthy or inadequate outcome of a creative process! As Jill Boucher has suggested, 'If improving the play skills of children with autism gives them a sense of mastery, and increases their pleasure and their motivation to play, then that is a justifiable aim in itself.'

Engagement of the Swans as creative and positive

Reflections written by some of the artists point to quite a different picture than that suggested by the teacher quoted above. Particularly, they suggest the presence of many different levels of experience and interaction beyond ‘just fun’. In an early workshop, for instance, Sue was clearly approaching the Swans through a perspective emphasising improvisation, sensory exploration and creative expression and communication:

The paper improvisation with the boys — oh my god — the rolling feel of it, the shredding, balling and tossing, lines of paper, lines of sticky with clumps and twirls and knots of paper, sheer exploding joy on ____’s face, winding and winding and winding until the roll is empty.  

The engagement of the artists and the Swans was not for her a matter of filling in time or ‘keeping them occupied’, it was actually about engagement, about communicating and learning from each other. Sue’s note from this session points to an appreciation of this engagement as mutually generative and inspiring, and filled with human and creative potential.

Reflecting on a later workshop, Jodee observed that,

‘____ is opening up a lot to us and is more interactive with us and smiling. _____, too had fun and loves throwing paper balls. This group are quite amazing because their responses can be quite abstract and sophisticated which is so inspiring. Ideas that came from them included — a hailstorm of balls, a cardboard steamroller, discovery of looking through the windows, winder, rapper, thrashers ... and again, spaces that you crawl through. This group are spatially creative and very present with their senses, so some sensorial stuff with them will be great to explore too ... like, taste, sight, smell, texture and more.’

What marks the fundamental character of these interactions — what differentiates them from stuffing paper down a toilet, if you like — is that they are situated within an explicitly creative space, and, moreover, a social space. Jodee’s comment above points to the development of interpersonal relationships as an important and valued part of the experience, for both her and the students. This theme of developing interpersonal skills, relationship building and social engagement re-emerged later in the residency, when the artists noted that

_______ played quite well with Jodee. He played with her on a step ladder that she lay down on the ground. He also played a bit with the cardboard box again. He signed to her ‘please’ after Jodee had asked him to say please. This was a first for him to sign with her.

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37 Sue, notes in the Summary of Events, workshop one, 14 July 2009.
38 Jodee, notes in the Summary of Events, workshop three, 28 July 2009.
39 Sue and Jodee, notes in the Summary of Events, 10 November 2009.
Likewise, Robyn’s reflections on the engagement of the Swans, and particularly the involvement of one of the students in the performance, also offer an alternate reading to the critical perspective of the teacher. One of the students — who had been fascinated with masking tape through the residency and often spent the workshops playing with tape, including stretching it out in long lines — ‘opened’ the show through stretching a long line of tape in front of where the students were lined up, waiting to introduce themselves. In doing so, he was participating within a group activity, taking up and performing a role within the context of a broader performance, and in a way that was socially interactional and responsive. For Robyn, this was hugely significant, and something she described being ‘thrilled’ about. In talking about the children exceeding the teachers’ expectations, she described the involvement of the students with additional needs as ‘a perfect example of that’. Similarly, after a session in term 4, where the Swans took part in a long improvisation with newspaper — ripping, scrunching, making balls and having snowball fights with each other and the adults in the room — Sue described her joy at seeing one of the Swans teachers playing with her students. Earlier in the residency, that same teacher had told Sue that she could expect that she wouldn’t ‘get anything out of them’, that is, to not expect the students to engage in any activities. Seeing that teacher and the student playing together and interacting and engaging with each other happily and excitedly was, as Sue put it, the highlight of her day.

‘Appropriate’ behaviour

What about the teacher’s criticism that the students would try to replicate activities (e.g. the unravelling of rolls of masking tape) elsewhere without understanding why it was not acceptable to do so? On the one hand, it is very possible to teach children — even those with profound developmental delays — about behaviours which are acceptable in particular contexts and not in others, and about different spaces and contexts within which different social codes apply. Children learn these kinds of differentiation all the time – running around is good in the park, for example, but not in the kitchen. On the other hand, being able to make these sorts of differentiations can be much harder for children with developmental delays or behavioural conditions such as autism, and this does need to be taken into account. While the artists engaged sensitively and thoughtfully with the Swans — and the conclusion of this report is that the engagement was positive — it is also true that teaching and engaging with students with profound additional needs can involve unique challenges and imperatives, as well as opportunities. One particular example of this, which does take up one of the critiques of the teacher mentioned above, is around the need for continuity of contact with artists interacting with the children, and the need for those children to be able to develop relationships and trust with particular people over time, rather than facing a high rotation of personnel coming in and out of their lives and space.

Future engagements with children with additional needs

Our suggestion is that, where a school-based project involves engagement with children with significant development delay and behavioural problems, Polyglot work with teachers and artists to focus particular attention on developing a vision for the engagement with those students, and make it a priority to rigorously
think through and workshop approaches, needs, techniques and called-for knowledge or experiences that might be particular to those students. In some instances, it might be fruitful to seek out the input of people with particular skills and knowledge around creative engagements with children with developmental delays or behavioural conditions (for example, in a consultative capacity), but we are keen to avoid the suggestion that such engagements need to defer to institutionalised ‘expert’ or ‘specialised’ forms of knowledge and practice.

Above all, if engagements with children like the Swans are going to continue to be a part of Polyglot’s practice, (and we would suggest that this would be positive), the priority for Polyglot is to develop experience, knowledge and skills in making those engagements as positive and generative as they can be.

In recommending this, we are also cognizant of some feedback from artists who expressed a sense of difficulty and uncertainty around their own engagement with the Swans. One artist, for instance, told us that, ‘I think more could have been done for them’. That artist also went to describe some very positive moments of engagement with the students, but thought that they could have benefited from more focussed attention and time, and felt a lack of confidence in their own ability to engage most effectively with them.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: Polyglot work with artists and teachers to focus attention on the particular needs of students with developmental delay or behavioural conditions — whether they be needs for particular styles of approach, techniques, types of experience or knowledge — and develop a vision for the engagement of those students as part of the broader visioning for creative projects.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: Where possible, engagement with students with additional needs should seek to ensure a continuity of contact between those students and particular artists, as opposed to a changing line-up of different artists and personnel.
OTHER ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE EVALUATION

Political and cultural positioning of the project: Dynamics between Deaf and hearing

At the outset of the project, this was flagged as a dynamic which was likely to emerge as significant in the project. Particularly, some of the artists communicated a strong sense of identification with Deaf community, culture and language, and clearly positioned the project (and their engagement with it) in a broader social and political context in which tensions could (and often did) exist between Deaf and hearing communities, including between teachers. This sense of identification and positioning influenced the hopes and expectations which these artists had for the project. There was considerable crossover, here, with hopes and expectations articulated by teachers at Furlong Park, including but not restricted to the Deaf teachers who were spoken to. These included ideas around the importance of celebrating and strengthening Deaf language, giving students access to Deaf role models, and developing communicative skills and experiences with sign, gesture, body language and facial expression.

Noticeably, however, the dynamics between Deaf and hearing people involved in the project did not emerge as a major issue through the evaluation process. This is not to say that such dynamics were not at play, and there is a real possibility that as researchers who are hearing and outsiders to the Deaf community, we were not well placed to pick up on them or have them discussed with us. However, our experience was that people were quite willing and open about discussing other dynamics and issues with us — particularly between teachers and artists — and these came through as much more significant in peoples’ experiences and reflections.

Organisational structure and communication

As a result of their positioning within different philosophies, educational approaches and cultural spaces, the artists and teachers involved in the Extended School Residency often had quite different approaches to organisation and structure. Where the teachers were working within a dominant culture and institutional framework which emphasises planning, curricula, structures and outcome-based models of assessment and value; Polyglot was working within a culture that stresses fluidity, openness, improvisation, and organic structure and practice. As is hopefully clear by now, this is the underpinning of Polyglot’s work and philosophy, in all its vibrancy and strength. That said, there was an enormous degree of flux and shift in the organisation and running of this project. In large part, this was unavoidable, and also reflective of the reality of the conditions in which artists and organisations like Polyglot have to work — juggling short-term, project based funding, and in the terms of artists short-term, casual or ad hoc employment; often managing overlapping, multiple commitments (both professional and personal); needing to be responsive to unpredictable external
circumstances (i.e. arts activities often take place in existing environments which the artists themselves have little control over, such as schools, public spaces, other institutional contexts).

By and large, Polyglot and the artists involved in the project needed to be enormously flexible during this project. There were frequent, and often lengthy periods of absence as different personnel were engaged in other personal or professional commitments, with the result that different artists moved in and out of the project across its duration. In many ways, this is indicative of a real organisational strength within Polyglot, and also a source of dynamism, creativity and inspiration. However, it also presents challenges, and some of these need to be acknowledged. In the first instance, it creates a risk that artists coming in to the project at short notice or in an ad hoc way may not feel adequately prepared for the project, or connected to its broader aims and vision. Secondly, it creates challenges for communication between artists, as well as between artists and teachers (and the school as an institution). Thirdly, it has the potential to be counter-productive for efforts to build relationships and trust with students, and this is likely to be a particular issue with students with additional needs. It also creates the risk of people moving in and out of the school space without knowing students names, without being able to get to know them well, or without having a good sense of their histories, stories, needs, likes, wants etc.

Nevertheless, in responding to these challenges, and the fluid reality it found itself in, Polyglot and the artists involved in the residency implemented a number of measures which were very effective and positive. The practice of writing session reports and summaries each week was a really strong feature of the process. It allowed for very effective communication across a wide group of people (often in several countries), and was also a process of ongoing documentation and self-evaluation, encouraging dialog while prompting people to reflect on learnings and experiences. In addition, in response to teacher concerns, some of the artists started to feeding into the weekly staff meetings, which allowed for regular checking-in, gathering feedback, and briefing of the teachers. Again, this was positive although our understanding is that it was not always regular. Finally, people like Jodee and Robyn in particular played critically important and invaluable roles in providing continuity across the duration of the project. They also, in important ways, became translators across different cultural spaces and perspectives, Jodee between Deaf and hearing worlds, and Robyn between the school environment and Polyglot. This sort of cultural and social translation was a vital and strong element of the residency process, and arguably held the project together through some moments of real flux.

**RECOMMENDATION FIVE:** That in visioning and thinking about engagements (particularly medium to long-term ones) Polyglot give particular attention to identifying people who can act as cultural and social ‘translators’ across areas of difference, and can provide continuity of contact and communication across the period of engagement.
4. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS
CONCLUSIONS

Overwhelmingly, the conclusion of this evaluation is that the extended school residency project at Furlong Park School was a positive and beneficial activity. This is not to say that there were no challenges, or that there aren’t areas of Polyglot Theatre’s practice which can be built upon and strengthened. Overall, however, the engagement of the Theatre with the school over the course of two terms produced positive outcomes for all participating groups, particularly (and most importantly) the students themselves. A key dimension of this evaluation was to explore the hopes and expectations of different participating groups at the start of this project, and to evaluate the project as it unfolded in relation to these goals. What emerged from the evaluation process was that, almost entirely, the goals articulated by both Furlong Park School and Polyglot Theatre were realised.

Realizing people’s hopes for the project

Both teachers and artists entered the Extended School Residency with a host of hopes and expectations for the project might and would achieve. Significantly, the aims and hopes of both groups overlapped considerably, although the expectations of how those hopes might be realised – i.e. the nature of the process – were seemingly at times quite divergent. Here, we briefly review some of these hopes and expectations for the project – many of them intertwined with one another – and consider to what extent the project can be considered to have successfully realised them.

To build the confidence of the students

Using mime, some sign and gestural communication, one of the students from the younger group acts out parts of the experience she enjoyed, including the scene in the final show where all the students stood in a line and introduced themselves. ‘Hi’, she demonstrates, ‘my name is ________ and I like pineapples!’ Asked if that was her favourite part of the night, she grins and nodded. Asked how she felt about the show, she replies, ‘I felt good’.

For both artists and teachers this was a deeply-felt and primary hope for the residency. Indeed, this was particularly the case for teachers, who identified a lack of confidence amongst students as a major challenge within the school environment. One of the many accomplishments of this project – and arguably one of the most significant – is that this appears to have been realised. Participant observation during the two terms showed the students engaging with increasing confidence and self-assuredness in the regular sessions, in an environment that was encouraging and nurturing. Their accomplishments and their presentations as part of the final outcome were demonstrative of this confidence, and, moreover, it is clear from the students’ own reflections on the
project that the experience of the final outcome itself was a source of pride and self-satisfaction. The comments and reflections of the students’ teachers, moreover, strongly reinforce this conclusion.

This might also be an appropriate place to briefly reflect on another hope, articulated by both teachers and artists again, namely that the process be enjoyable for the students. Overwhelmingly, this was the case, and is evident in the comments, reflections and behaviours of the students, as well as comments from their teachers. Indeed, teachers at the school were unanimous in describing the experience as an enjoyable one for their students, even as some of them were finding it at times less than enjoyable themselves.

To grow the children’s creative expression and capabilities

Again, this was identified as critically important by both Furlong Park School and Polyglot Theatre. And here, again, the residency can be considered a success. We can point, in the first instance, to the comments of teachers who described a lack of creativity, and a timidity in expression amongst their own students prior to the residency beginning, and contrast these to the comments teachers made during and at the completion of the residency. For example, comments like this – ‘I’ve found with my own class that they’re not that creative’ – made at the start of the residency, stand in sharp distinction to comments such as this – ‘it was just amazing — they can draw, they can do everything’ – or this – ‘it was just so creative!’.” Likewise, teachers were effusive in their praise for the final outcome, and some explicitly drew attention to the fact that they enjoyed that the ideas and creative content had been generated by the students themselves. An important point to be made here – and this is a connection which both teachers and artists articulated – is that a key dimension of growing the children’s creativity was growing their confidence in their own creative expression. In this sense, this project goal is closely tied up with the previous one.

We can look, as well, to the responses of Polyglot artists to the Furlong Park students and the weekly sessions. Consistently, the artists talked excitedly about the creativity and responsiveness of the students. Perhaps most significantly, they drew inspiration themselves from the expressions and imaginings of the children. This was evident in the weekly session summaries, which included ideas for further creative development that had emerged from the students, and also, movingly, in the creation of the ‘paper room’ as part of the final outcome – a vivid sensory and interactional space which took direct inspiration from the improvisations of, and with, the Swans students. That the Polyglot artists approached the students in this way – as creative agents, capable of inspiring, stimulating and imagining into being – is itself testament to the efficacy of the residency project in harnessing, growing and encouraging their creative potential over the course of the engagement.

Of course, the strongest ‘evidence’ for the project achieving this objective is the creative vibrancy and dynamism of the students themselves. We can point here to the costumes, puppets, performances and models created by the students; to the poetic and expressive Visual Vernacular pieces the older students developed; to the transformation of the school space for the final outcome; and to the ways in which that final outcome was very much a product of a child-led creative development process, reflecting the ideas, improvisations and play of the
Furlong Park students. As one example amongst many which can be found in this report, think of the improvisations with paper and tape which resulted in the giant balls that in turn became a recurring motif and a catalyst for further improvisation and creative expression.

To strengthen Deaf language and culture within the school and the students’ lives

This goal was not articulated by all teachers and artists going into the residency, but nevertheless was powerfully and strongly-felt by those who did. Predominantly, these people were themselves Deaf, or otherwise personally embedded within the Deaf community. Importantly, this hope for the project was also shared and encouraged by the school principal, Robyn Lawrence, as it was by the Artistic Director of Polyglot, Sue Giles. In our opinion, the residency was able to contribute strongly towards the development of Deaf language and culture in the lives of the students, due in no small part to the passion and commitment of these people.

Within a small school with a student population of between 30 and 40 – of whom many have no or limited exposure to Deaf language and culture in their home environment – and with a minority of teachers themselves Deaf, the regular presence of Deaf and other native-Auslan users within the school over an extended period of time was positive and transformative. We have seen in Section One that a number of teachers highlighted the limited number of adult role-models for students to ‘model’ themselves on. Likewise, Mark drew attention to the role that he could play as a language role model, and particularly as a male adult in a school environment where the staff was entirely female (and both he and Heath were an important presence in this regards). Without in any way wanting to diminish the critical role played by Deaf teachers at Furlong Park, and indeed in other Deaf schools, the engagement of artists such as Medina and Anna was able to significantly expand the field of Deaf role models to which the Furlong Park students had access, offering new imaginings of what successful, vibrant Deaf adult-hood could entail.

Moreover, the content of the residency itself, and the nature of the artists’ engagement with the school, created a dynamic, language-positive and culturally rich space. The use of Visual Vernacular allowed for an exploration and celebration of language which was taken up by the older students – as evidenced in the performance which they developed and presented, and in the excitement with which the students demonstrated and talked about the use of VV in the evaluation conversations. The exchange of videos and stories with the young people in Cambodia offered insights into a Deaf community in a different country and cultural context, and indeed to the possibility of a global Deaf community. The use – and encouragement of the use – of Auslan within the sessions, as well as the exploration of mime, physical theatre and other embodied and visual forms of creative expression, can all be seen as contributing to the strengthening of Deaf language and culture.

The comments and feedback of teachers support the finding that this was a positive dimension of the residency. For instance, one teacher – herself Deaf – commented that the signing of her students was much improved, as well as their use of gesture, body language and facial expression. Robyn, similarly, talked enthusiastically about the positive effects of Visual Vernacular for the students’ communication.
It is unclear, however, to what extent the strengthening of Deaf language and culture had an effect on the school environment in terms, particularly, of the non-Deaf, non-native Auslan using section of the teaching population. On the one hand, teachers as well as students were exposed to the Deaf artists and other fluent Auslan users entering the school environment, and the introduction of new forms of expression such as VV. On the other hand, though, none of the hearing teachers talked about or commented on the strengthening of Deaf language and culture as an important aspect of the residency (with the exception of Robyn). This, perhaps, is an area for future development and consideration.

To recognise and give value to the thoughts and abilities of the children

Here again, the residency was able to achieve a key goal. Primarily, this was a hope for the project articulated by Polyglot (more than by the school), and stems directly from the philosophy with which the Theatre operates. From the outset, Polyglot artists talked about the importance of giving value to the contributions of children, of recognising them as ‘experts’ in creativity, showing faith in them, letting them lead the process of creative development, and also of being able to share this way of seeing the children with other adults in their lives, including teachers and parents.

It has already been discussed above – in regards to the developing of creative expression – the way in which the creative development process unfolded as child-led and child-centred. To this, though, we can add the success of the project in expanding the teachers’ sense of what their students might be capable of. Here, it’s worth revisiting a comment made by the school principal, Robyn:

One of the things that I think is just so important, that we’ve all learnt, is never, ever to pre-judge the kids in what they might be able to achieve, because they’ve shown us that they can do far more than we thought they might be able to do.

Similarly, in staging a final outcome – although this was not initially planned as part of the residency – the project was able to give value to the thoughts, abilities, imaginings and creations of the children in the eyes of their parents and family. This was particularly significant when considered in light of the fact that many of the parents have relatively little contact with the school because the students usually travel to and from school bus, rather than being dropped off by their parents. The reflections and responses of the students, too, point to the sense of pride they felt in showcasing their talents and experiences to their families. The residency, then, was also able to give value to the thoughts and abilities of the children at Furlong Park, in their own eyes.
To share learnings and experiences with Furlong Park teachers

The difficulties and challenges experienced in relationships between teachers and artists have been discussed in considerable detail in the previous sections. Here, we would like to make just a few points by way of summary and conclusion. Firstly, the experience was challenging, for both groups, and our suggestion is that the residency can in part be understood as two quite different cultural spaces, with quite different understandings of engagement with children, of types and practices of learning, of creativity and of play. There was, also, we think, something of a clash from having new figures of authority – the Polyglot artists – coming into a school environment where the existing authority figures – the teachers – were often unclear about what to do, what their role should be, and how they should engage.

Secondly, though, we want to make the point quite emphatically that challenge is not necessarily negative, and can indeed by very positive and transformative. Think here, for example, of the ways in which the project was able to challenge the teachers’ expectations of what their students could do and achieve. Indeed, many of the teachers we interviewed at the end of the residency expressed that, although the process had at times been difficult for them, even frustrating, they could also recognise that it had been valuable for themselves as well as for their students. Several identified aspects of the project – such as the use of shadow puppets, for example – that they had taken up and were using in the classroom.

In sum, we think this is an aspect of Polyglot’s engagement which needs to be worked upon for future projects such as this, and we make some recommendations to this effect which are reprinted at the end of this document. Specifically, these are intended to suggest ways that the exchange between teachers and artists can be more mutually generative and beneficial, and more constructive. More could be done, we think, to share with the teachers different models and philosophies of learning and teaching, and to make the residency experience a positive learning experience for them and for the artists. However we also want to make clear that these findings and recommendations are offered with the hope that they will improve the nature and experience of the challenge, rather than remove the challenge per se.

To develop a meaningful cultural exchange with the Cambodian students

This aspect of the residency project did not, in the end, have the centrality which may have been imagined for it at the beginning. For instance, hopes that the students might form friendships which could extend over years of engagement, don’t seem to have been realised, and this may have something to do with the significant age difference between the two groups. Nevertheless, the exchange between Kampot and Furlong Park was still a positive and significant experience. The Furlong Park students were excited about and engaged with the video they received, and in creating one to send back to Kampot. As we have seen previously, some of the students were also able to articulate some of the things which they learnt about the Cambodian students, and the differences between their lives, although this was not an aspect of their experience which was highlighted by many students in the evaluation conversations (or, for that matter, by teachers). In addition, aside from the two
video postcards – ‘One Day in Kampot’ and ‘A Day at Furlong Park’ – there was another video exchange in the form of the VV performances, with the Visual Vernacular performance of the Furlong Park students picking up on, and responding to, the Visual Vernacular created by the young people at Epic Arts.

Moreover, while the Cambodian-link may not have taken on the centrality which was perhaps envisaged for it, the residency can be seen as successfully building up relationships and connections between Polyglot Theatre and Epic Arts. This connection holds exciting possibilities for future development and exploration.

Challenges

While the Extended School Residency almost entirely achieved the hopes and expectations which both Furlong Park and Polyglot Theatre had for the project, the process of achieving them was not without challenges. Here we consider these briefly, with a view to thinking about how they can act as learning experiences for future engagements such as this.

Organisation and communication processes

Like most arts organisations, Polyglot have to grapple with external realities, far from ideal, which can create structural constraints on the ways in which they are able to work. For instance, project-based funding makes long-term, ‘big picture’ planning difficult, can constrain people and activities within short-term funding cycles, and also makes it difficult to engage staff except on an ad hoc, casual basis. Funding, too, is also frequently just inadequate. Within Polyglot a small number of permanently-employed staff are spread thin across a large number of projects and activities, working long hours with an extraordinary amount of energy and commitment.

Working in such an environment, arts organisations are called upon to be adaptable, flexible and highly responsive to changes in circumstance. Overwhelmingly, this was the case with Polyglot during the Extended School Residency. Nevertheless, there were challenges, and aspects which could be improved upon. In the first instance, there was a very high turn-over of staff. Many personnel were unavailable for periods of time, whether for personal reasons or because of other professional commitments. This high turn-over arguably contributed to what at times was a lack of coherence across the project. Teachers and students found themselves dealing with different people frequently, and in some instances artists employed by Polyglot on an ad hoc basis were left feeling disconnected from the bigger project, and less supported by the project than they could have been. In addition, the project manager was, for personal reasons, unavailable for a period of the project. Circumstances such as these are unavoidable, but this was a critical role, and the lack of consistency in it across the duration of the project probably contributed to the sense of organisational and communication incoherence.

While recognising the constraints within which Polyglot has to work, the level of turn-over of artists in this project was higher than ideal. People like Sue and Jodee played an important part in holding together the big
picture of where the residency was going, and Jodee’s regular email communication – even when she was away – provided a critical sense of consistency across the project. It would have been good, however, to have at least one person who was physically present – and in a central role – across the duration of the whole project. This might also have provided some additional support for those artists who were engaged in the project on an ad hoc basis, without necessarily feeling connected to the project as a whole. It may also have provided some consistency for teachers and students, and improved teachers’ experience of the project.

**Intersection with institutional structures**

The organisational structure and philosophy of Polyglot as an organisation – emphasising fluidity, organic and evolving project designs, creativity, dynamism, improvisation, and an inherent challenge to ideas of authority and expertise – locates it in contradistinction to the structures and practices of most formal institutional spaces, such as schools, which tend to emphasise planning, structure, hierarchal relationships of authority, pre-existing frameworks and outputs. The coming together of these quite different cultural spaces can be generative and positive – and Polyglot’s engagement within such institutional structures can be transformative – but it also carries the potential for friction and mutual incomprehension. In different ways, the extended school residency at Furlong Park saw both of these different potentialities play out, with tensions between teachers and artists, but also transformations in the school space – quite literally, in the case of the final outcome – and in the ways in which students were seen and engaged with – as students and as children.

The recommendations which this report makes about engagement with teachers, can largely be understood as a response to the challenge of engaging in formal institutional spaces. To this extent, we recommend sessions be run with the teachers prior to the engagement with students, and, further, that tools such as scenarios exercises be used as a way of exploring the different ways in which both groups approach situations or problems, and engendering some mutual understanding and empathy for the values, ideas and cultural frames which inform people’s practices and decisions. We have also highlighted the importance of those people who are able to function as kinds of ‘cultural translators’ – people for instance, like Robyn, who was firmly placed within the school environment, but had a clear grasp on what Polyglot was trying to achieve, and the philosophy with which it was operating. Likewise, too, Jodee played an important role in this regard as someone who was hearing, but also part of the Deaf community, and so able to act as a bridge between these two worlds.

**Engagement with children with special needs**

In discussing this as a ‘challenge’, we want to make clear that this aspect of the residency was also strong, vibrant and inspiring. In presenting challenges, it also offers immense and exciting possibilities. While many of the artists found their engagement with the Swans students immensely satisfying, though, others described a sense of anxiety or uncertainty about how to engage, and what to do to ensure that the experience was as positive for the students as it could have been. A strong critique was made of the engagement with the Swans, which we have
responded to in detail in this report. On the whole, our reading of that engagement differed strongly from the reading presented by that teacher, but we do acknowledge that children such as the Swans may well have different needs, and in some situations be most responsive to different forms of engagement, than other children. As an example, the point was made that some of the Swans students would have benefitted from having a continuity of contact with particular artists, rather than experiencing a large number of new people coming in and out of their lives over the two-term period.

To this end, we recommend that where projects will involve engagement with children with additional needs, there be targeted and focused thinking and preparation around how best to approach their engagement, and what (if any) strategies might be employed to ensure that their experience is as positive as it can be. This would ideally involve the teachers of the students, and might also involve some consultation with people who have expertise or experience around creativity and children with additional needs, and possibly also their parents or family members. The point here is not to ‘fix’ an idea of what the engagement will involve, and certainly not to take on preconceived ideas of what the children are capable of – but to share knowledge, experience and imaginings.

**Building on Polyglot’s strengths**

This report finishes here, with a final comment on the residency, and on what we see to be Polyglot’s strengths. Extended over a period of two terms, the residency allowed for a sustained interaction and engagement which was overwhelmingly successful in meeting the hopes and expectations with which different participants began the journey. Amongst these, we can point particularly to the extent to which the Polyglot Theatre’s residency at the school resulted in a growing and strengthening of the creative expression of the students engaged in the program, in an increase in their confidence and, moreover, in an increase in their confidence in their own creative abilities and imaginings. Through a child-led journey of creative development, which emphasised process and shared social experience and exploration, the project gave value to the ideas and abilities of the students at Furlong Park school, and was able in important ways to transform the school environment and create opportunities for teachers and parents to see and appreciate the children they care for in new ways. Significantly, as well, where creative ‘output’ and ‘process’ are frequently counter-posed within arts practice, the project led to the creation of a final outcome – a night of performance and interaction – which was very much a testament to, and a celebration of, the creative and social process out of which it emerged. Culturally, the project made an important contribution to the school environment through celebrating and strengthening Deaf culture and language, particularly through the presence of Deaf adult role models, the creation of a language-positive environment, and the development of creative skills in the areas of performance and embodied communication (particularly, the exploration of Visual Vernacular). The project also enabled an exchange – cultural and personal – between the students in Sunshine and Deaf young people in Cambodia, which, although not as central an aspect of the project as was initially envisaged, was nevertheless positive.
The success of the project – the extent to which it realized many of the hopes and aims of both Furlong Park School and Polyglot Theatre, creating a positive and enriching experience for the students it engaged – draws our attention to some of the core strengths of Polyglot as an organisation and as a community of artists. Firstly, its **people**: the artists involved in the project – including those who are permanent staff of the organisation, those with a long history of involvement, and those involved in a more ad hoc capacity – were passionate, engaged, committed and with high levels of skill and ability. The success of the project in engaging the minds and imaginations of the students was in no small part a result of the quality of the relationships which were built between them and the artists. Secondly, its **practice and philosophy**: emphasising the importance of process, child-led creative development, improvisation and imaginative possibilities and explorations, Polyglot works with a deeply-held philosophy which guides and informs its practice, and which, at Furlong Park, created a transformative space for both the children and the adults who care for them. Thirdly, its **reflexivity and culture of self-interrogation**: in commissioning an evaluation as a substantive component of this project, in enacting practices such as regular artists’ reports, and in engaging external artists (notably, Deaf artists) to comment critically on the project’s final outcome, Polyglot demonstrated a culture of critique, reflection and learning which is also indicative of the openness which inform its creative practice. Fourthly, the **challenge** it presents: at its best, Polyglot draws on a rich understanding of the artistic tradition, where art and creativity present a challenge to social spaces and relationships, offering new visions, imaginings and possibilities for what those spaces relationships might look like.

To the extent that this report has identified areas where Polyglot might build upon and seek to improve its own practice, our hope is that these are seen as sites of possibility. The recommendations which are listed below will, we hope, assist in building on Polyglot’s strengths in future collaborations and creations.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Polyglot run one or two workshop sessions with teachers, prior to the commencement of workshops with students, and that these be oriented towards sharing teaching skills, techniques and philosophies; sharing knowledge and experience; and building relationships and mutual trust and understanding between teachers and artists.

2. That consideration be given to including the teachers in the final outcome in some creative capacity.

3. Polyglot work with artists and teachers to focus attention on the particular needs of students with developmental delay or behavioural conditions — whether they be needs for particular styles of approach, techniques, types of experience or knowledge — and develop a vision for the engagement of those students as part of the broader visioning for creative projects.

4. Where possible, engagement with students with additional needs should seek to ensure a continuity of contact between those students and particular artists, as opposed to a changing line-up of different artists and personnel.

5. That in visioning and thinking about engagements (particularly medium to long-term ones) Polyglot give particular attention to identifying people who can act as cultural and social ‘translators’ across areas of difference, and can provide continuity of contact and communication across the period of engagement.
5. APPENDIXES
APPENDIX A: ARTISTS’ RESPONSES TO THE FINAL OUTCOME

Polyglot asked two artists – one, Asphyxia, a Deaf performer who was also engaged as a consultant on the early stages of the project, and the other, Emily Sexton, a theatre maker and producer (hearing) and current Creative Producer of the Melbourne Fringe Festival – to attend the final outcome on the 26th November 2009, and provide feedback – critical responses as artists – on the show.

Artist’s response, by Asphyxia

Wow, what an amazing event! I was very impressed with the gorgeous yet simple world that you all created. It was delightful. Well done to everyone on the team.

Overview

There was a real sense of vibrant energy about the project – the kids seemed to be oozing with it and so did the artists. I left feeling uplifted and inspired. I particularly loved the aesthetic – the newspaper, cardboard, tape and white paper had a calming, childlike-quality that was both refreshing and comforting. I was also pleased to see a show that focuses on re-using (with the newspaper).

Some things I loved

- The newspaper walls!
- The connection with the project in Cambodia, and a sense of getting to "meet" the Cambodian kids through video.
- When the performance began and we saw the shadow of the kids through the paper screen, it was exquisite.
- The rod puppet aquarium! This was wonderful...
- The audience participation - inviting us to draw with the reminder "don't be afraid".
- The space under the table in the room full of newspaper - when I lay under there with Jodee and Anna I felt a real sense of calm come over me - and I imagine this is one of the delightful ways this project was a wonderful experience for the kids.
- The lighting in the room with the Australian/Cambodian video was wonderful, simple, and added a lot of mood. Loved the cardboard boxes in here with the kids' creations and one for the audience to climb into as well. Having kids crawling through there while I was in the room added lovely energy.
- The costumes worn by some of the kids made with paper - especially _____’s dress, and a boy who was wearing several cones down his back.
- The cardboard "houses" on the oval that the kids all ran into.
- Cardboard flaps with faces drawn by the kids behind them. I loved that it was simply black texta on white paper too.
- The signs on the doors of each room - great text.
- On the video the Cambodian boy wore a red gingham bandanna while doing VV, and then this theme was continued as we saw the Australian boy also wearing a gingham bandanna (would have been good if he'd worn it during the live performance too) – I loved the link and continuity.

**Ideas that could help you reflect the process better**

The videos of 'a day in the life of Australians / Cambodians' was really interesting. I think it would go a step further if it was edited so that we could see a few more parallels. For example, the editing script for each video might be "1 minute of shots of the general location, 2 minutes of the kids eating/procuring food, 2 minutes of a puppetry class," … and so on. This way when both videos are played simultaneously the viewer would get a real sense of the differences of the two places. We might see the kid in Cambodia shimmy up the tree to get a coconut, while on the Australian screen the girl is eating spaghetti from a plastic container. This would really highlight the difference in food culture in the two places.

In the hallway I stood and read quite a bit of the class notes that were taped to the wall, so had a real sense of what had been happening to create this project. Later when I saw the photo board, I saw the boy with black charcoal on his hands and immediately remembered the text I had read about working with charcoal. To make the photos more engaging it would be excellent to have captions (handwritten onto them with a black texta would be fine) with a memory about the activity or information for the viewer telling the story of this photograph. I noticed at the right hand end of the board there were some captions and they made all the difference – they drew me in to really look at and understand the photos and what they meant.

There was too much text taped to the wall to be practical for audiences to read it all (thank you Jodee for directing me onwards!!) – perhaps for future you could pick a handful of highlights, and print them on A3 size paper in a larger print so they jump out at us more and are a bit easier to read. They gave me a real insight into what lead to this installation and I think audiences would really enjoy this glimpse too.

**Ideas to improve the event theatrically**

While I've made several suggestions here, I realise that process is more important than outcomes, and that some of my ideas might compromise the process and thus not be worthwhile. But I include them anyway in case they can work for both process and outcome.
In the "entrance hall" with the cardboard flaps, in the area where we opened the flaps to see actual children behind, I think it would be great to have a backdrop (like the "aquarium") and the children quite a lot more costumed. When I glanced in the kids were just milling about and there wasn't a lot of sense of theatre.

It would be good to have a bit more of a sense of pathway and direction to make sure the audience sees everything. Maybe a signpost/map at the entry saying that in xx room the performance will begin at xx time - make sure you check out the yy room, the zz room and the ww room before the show begins! (Unfortunately I missed the newspaper-filled room before the performance).

Go a bit further with the paper costumes on the kids – it would look wonderful if they were all outfitted entirely in paper costumes, with outlandish and incredible shaped headdresses. The fancy hats looked wonderful on some of the kids during their shadow-puppet scene – I would have liked to see much more of this.

With the videos, some of them felt a bit "swimmy". It would be great to use a tripod if possible, or encourage the camera-person to hold the camera steady and avoid moving it around too much.

During the beginning of the final video of the performance, a teacher was talking and an interpreter was signing – it wasn’t a Deaf-friendly moment as (a) the interpreter was not lit, and (b) the Deaf audience members needed to choose between watching the video and watching the interpreter. Next time make sure the talking/interpreting is finished before the video starts.

With the same video, the content of the Australian kids' VV was the same as we had already watched in the performance. Best to avoid doubling up.

During the outdoor part of the performance, I really enjoyed watching the kids introduce themselves and tell us something they liked. The supportive and enthusiastic environment as they slapped hands with the other kids was wonderful to watch. However this became a bit tedious once we realised we had to watch every single kid in the line do it. It would have been much better to get a group of, say, 5 kids, to do that particular style of introduction, then another group of 5 kids to do something a bit different (for example they might present themselves in a paper costume representing the thing that they like, and rather than slapping hands do a short movement sequence that represents the thing, and then another group of 5 kids might each have a paper rod puppet that reflects the thing they like.. and so on)... Also to avoid the audience getting the sense of tedium as they realise they need to sit through something from each kid, better to have just 5 or so kids on the "stage" at a time, and then shepherd them off and bring on the next bunch. This way the event takes on the feeling of having a number of short acts, but still gives each kid their moment in the sun.

But overall, well done! It was a gorgeous event and I wish I’d brought my 6 year old, as he would have loved it. I think next time we’re having a pyjama day I’ll pull out newspaper and masking tape and make a cubby with him under the table...
**Artist’s response, by Emily Sexton**

On Thursday 26th November, I attended the final celebration of the work Polyglot’s artists had done with the children and teachers of Furlong Park School for Deaf Children. Despite the ample information provided by Simon and Sue, I had little idea of what I would encounter when I arrived at the school. Likewise, having only moved to Melbourne a few years ago, I had not visited Sunshine before. My background is as a theatre maker and producer, in community cultural development and currently, as Creative Producer of the Melbourne Fringe Festival.

**Experience**

I arrived at the front school, and about six kids dressed as paper crocodiles, dragons and police were welcoming an audience of approximately 80 people. This audience was diverse culturally and in the abilities represented, and dominated by parents and family members of the performers.

We were welcomed by the Principal, and told that we were about to experience an installation, rather than a show. At this time I realised that the idea of a 'performance installation' was quite new to a lot of those in the audience, and they had as little idea of what to expect as I did. We were encouraged to be adventurous, touch and explore.

We filed into the school, through hanging streams of cut-up newspaper. We entered a tunnel completely covered in newspaper, with various cardboard flaps to be lifted - underneath were pictures drawn by the kids - and then, underneath the next flap, were the kids themselves! This was an absolutely beautiful moment that instantly brought the first of many tears to many eyes. There was an intense connection made between the 'performer' and his 'audience' (his Mum and sisters), which went far beyond anything that may have been experienced in a more traditional play. As if they were 'seeing' each other anew, the pride and wonder in this moment was palpable and set up an experience in which I was acutely aware of the experiences of deaf children, and how this related to the magical world that had been created.

We progressed through the tunnel, out into an 'aquarium' with cardboard and paper puppets, onto a three-act shadow puppet play (actual duration: 30 seconds), corridors filled with beautiful large photographs of the kids, their teachers and Polyglot artists. I spent quite a bit of time reading the artists' written reflections on the process, which coupled with the photographs meant for a wonderful insight into the challenges of making the work.

Sheets of newspaper continued to cover the school from floor to ceiling as we kept walking into four new rooms - one dedicated to making something with paper and attaching it to a massive sticky mobile, one filled with video screens depicting kids from a school in Cambodia as well as Furlong Park, a "secret room" in which a young girl silently screamed 'DRAW YOUR FACE!!' – which I dutifully did – and the final room, which was filled with
pictures, stories, giant balls of newspaper and a beautiful light-filled diorama. After some wonderful game-playing with the kids and lots of listening in to parents’ reactions, we were herded into the largest room. The giant paper wall became a ‘human’ shadow puppet display of delightful dancing and movement. A fantastic reveal occurred when the kids excitedly ripped down the paper wall, perhaps one of two climaxes in the show. We then filed outside to watch what I would consider to be the third phase of the work, a moving and joyous set of physical actions and games against the bright green and red astro-turf. If we were ever lost, we were fortunate to have the fourth-wall-disruptive brilliance of a spontaneous narrator (what was his name?!). Perhaps 50 red cardboard boxes were laid out like a city, striking against the green ‘grass.’ In the second climax of the piece, every kid went screaming and running into their own world – immensely satisfying and totally joyous. Finally, we went back inside to watch a progressive film piece, with the story and style of movement shared between Furlong Park and the Cambodian school.

**Reflections**

In 2009 I’ve seen 254 shows. This was one of my most joyous experiences of performance.

Rapture, confidence and pride exuded from these kids in a way I’ve yet to encounter amongst any other performance by young people. It caused me to reflect upon the lack of creativity in a normal school play – these performance modes showcase discipline and rehearsal, and mostly the creative genius of the drama teacher. In Polyglot’s work, creative exchange and ideas are happening *in* the performance, *with* the parents, as led by the kids themselves.

The Furlong Park kids – facing enormous challenges in their everyday life – were so clearly comfortable and confident in the world that had been created. This allowed them as performers to take risks, and exult in the magic of their own creation. The show was properly owned by its performers, in a very physical way; they rushed from all sides, so eager to draw our attention to the various aspects of the show.

Jodee, Sue and their team set up tasks, structures and constraints that allowed an organic theatricality to take on its own life. That is, the games and ideas of the performance meant that the kids knew what needed to be achieved, and also when to push boundaries. It meant that the entire production had a fantastic spontaneity, that highlighted and celebrated the kids’ creativity on their own terms.

The use of newspaper as a medium gave the performance a cohesive aesthetic, and also gave me some insight into how overwhelming and confusing the world must seem when one is hearing-impaired. There was such an overwhelming array of pictures and words, with the occasional flash of recognition, but not much more.

The pacing of the piece was relentless, but joyously so, and in a way that made me laugh. I don’t think I’d have it any other way; perhaps with more performances under their belts, the kids may consider stillness. Perhaps also with a smaller audience, more control may have been able to be executed over the audience’s experience.
The kids seemed to have an intuitive and super confident understanding of their audience; despite being a total stranger, I had the opportunity to play games with the kids, they instructed me in what I should be doing and when, and were genuinely interested in the response of their audience. Indeed, the entire experience was an extraordinary achievement in audience development, showing the more avant garde possibilities of contemporary performance.

This is theatre that makes people love theatre.

Thank you Polyglot, I felt privileged to have witnessed your work and to enter that small community as an observer. When’s the next one?!
APPENDIX B: ARTISTS’ SESSION SUMMARIES

Included here are the session summaries which were written by artists after most of the Polyglot sessions at Furlong Park. The names of students have been removed, as they have been throughout the report. Also, after many of the sessions in the first term, an evolving list of created ideas generated from the sessions was included at the end of the summary, each week listing the ideas to date and adding new ones. To avoid duplication, this is listed here just once, at the end of this section.

Workshop One, 14 July 2009

The workshops were led by Heath, Sue and Jodee. The first group was a combination of the older kids. The second were the younger ones. The last group were 2 of the kids with special needs. With this group- we focused on the drawing and making with paper and tape which led to an incredible one hour improvisation. See creative description below on page 2).

What the artists did

WARM UP: Each workshop began with Jodee leading the FIRE, SUN, FLOOD, WIND game. The kids really got into it. Jodee would sign each word and the kids had to go into a specific position, i.e.: ‘Sun’- means you have to lie on your back. ‘Fire’ means: lie on your front and so on. It’s a good warm up game and the kids responded well. Heath and Sue would lead the Tail game where kids would have paper tails and chase each other. They really like this one too. Then Jodee led a handshape game which requires the kids to think up signs or iconic signs in specific handshapes. It’s a really brain teaser and the older kids responded much faster than the younger ones, however, the younger ones really benefit from doing it and I believe introduces them to the fundamental principles of sign language in a creative way.

MAKING AND DRAWING: Heath and Sue led this part of the workshop. The kids started out with large sheets of paper and charcoal. They began drawing circles, then lines, then waves, then dots... and then had the pleasure of rubbing their hands in it! Everyone had black hands and laughed lots. Then a new sheet of paper was brought out. Sue asked the kids to draw their own landscape which would then connect to their peers sitting next to them. Large landscapes emerged featuring worlds of all sorts. See descriptions below for some of the highlights. We have them in the studio too. After that, Heath and Sue showed how paper can become anything the kids like...the kids made all sorts of things, paper boats, wedding gowns, moustaches, birds, crown and a cape, people, a jelly fish, and more...it was ace really.
PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVISATION: After everyone had finished making their paper objects, puppets, props and costumes the kids all gathered in the hall and we did short improvisations in the groups. All sorts of fantastic material emerged (see below for highlights).

SUE'S THOUGHTS: The paper improvisation with the boys – oh my god – the rolling feel of it, the shredding, baling a tossing, lines of paper, lines of sticky with clumps and twirls and knots of paper, sheer exploding joy on ______ face, winding and winding and winding until the roll is empty.

Gorgeous game of FIRE! Great to have a game that deliberately includes HUGS

Wonderful watching the round the circle sign game – challenging and thoughtful and time given to making sure everyone worked hard on what they were creating – also loved seeing teachers trying desperately not to correct or interfere but let the dynamic play itself out. Also fascinating see them see how we see them – convoluted but you know what I mean – pulling themselves back or noticing what they say about children and suddenly going oh I said THAT

Great experiencing the dynamic in the group – who’s going to need extra time or one on one - who’s going to love extra challenge and stimulus – and SO many ideas flying around the room – every second and on triple levels – pictorial, physical, visual and verbal.

Loved the gorgeous grayness and softness of the paper as it got demolished. Loved the moment of everyone realising they were going to smudge. That little boy’s Hand prints and numbers, ______’s writing, so many images on the big landscape, the bride and the wedding, the little boat and the giant jelly fish, the masked marauders. ______ who makes things out of anything

JODEE'S THOUGHTS: I love the ‘king’ on the mobile throne- the boy ‘who has no balance’ being carried around for the day.

The boy in the last group who wrapped himself in two rolls of masking tape and looked like he had a dress designed by Vivenne Westwood.

Watching the kids explore hand shapes for the first time and apply them in a creative way

The character of the girl who couldn't stop eating and eating...and the kids running in and offering her chairs, tables, balls, bowls...a fantastic offer

The gentleness of the paper boat and the jelly fish. Seeing the boy with the oxygen tank being the assistant director was brilliant. Creating a paper world (lying under a table) and looking up as if we were under water or in some underworld.
Workshop Two, 21 July 2009 (Written by Jodee Mundy)

The first workshop was led by Sue, Medina and Jodee. The first group was a combination of the older kids. Heath joined us for second group which consisted of the younger ones. The last group were 3 of the kids with special needs. See creative description below.

Aims of the workshop

- Develop trust and a sense of play
- Ensemble work
- Nothing is right or wrong
- Introduce imitation skills
- Introduce Visual Vernacular
- sign language story telling conventions
- Introduction to fairy tale
- Introduction to devising stories
- Freedom of expression in drawing
- Developing confidence in drawing 'big' on large pieces of paper
- Allowing the imagination to communicate through paper
- Making and animating puppets
- Using tools like sticky tape, crayons, textas
- The lead up to performance and deadlines
- Conventions of theatre such as an MC, a curtain, an interpreter (deaf or hearing), a entrance, a climax, an exit, audience response
- Developing confidence to perform and improvise in front of peers and teachers.
- Clarify and work towards strengthening the relationship between the teachers and artists
- Teachers to participate and be free to play with the kids
- Allow teachers an opportunity to see their students in a different way and vice versa
- Work towards how to evaluate the workshops with the teachers and benefit from their expertise.

What the artists did

PERFORMING ARTS: Each workshop began with Jodee leading the FIRE, SUN, FLOOD, WIND game. The kids really got into it. Jodee would sign each word and the kids had to go into a specific position, i.e. ‘sun’ means you have to lie on your back. ‘Fire’ means lie on your front and so on. It’s a good warm up game and the kids responded well. Medina led the next part. The kids formed a circle. Medina began by pulling a face (like a mask) and the participant next to her, copies the expression, then turns to the participant next to them, drops the face, creates a new one, and then ‘passes it on’. This exercise is great for the kids to recognise expression, develop their imitation skills, drop into a neutral face, and then create a funny face of their own. Once they went around
the circle, Medina then extended the same concept into using the whole of the body. Again, everyone copied, and created their own physical posture and passed it down the line. This is a good exercise for awakening the body, imitation and extending expression from the face into the whole body. It also develops confidence for the participants to express themselves. Some kids were self conscious, however, after some time, came out of their shell. It’s also fun to see people pull funny faces and do silly things! Next Medina led a Visual Vernacular exercise – VV is a style of theatre developed by the National Theatre of the Deaf in America which influenced Australian Theatre of the Deaf and their style of work. Medina led the kids through a story of a person walking through a landscape and meeting lots of creatures along the way and introduced some basic principles of role shift, changing scale and using the signing space as a ‘kind of stage’. Medina will be building up their VV skills as we continue the residency with the kids. This is an excellent form of theatre for the kids as it introduces the kids to basic conventions of the paralinguistics of story telling in sign language and its relationship to theatre.

VISUAL/ PUPPETRY AND COSTUME MAKING: Sue led this part of the workshop. The first group- the older group were asked to talk about Little Red Riding Hood. As group they worked out the story and then went off to draw the characters, house and what any of the other impressions they had were...They then made lots of responses to Little Red Riding Hood such as paper axes, paper wolves, paper dresses, a paper basket, paper wolf ears and teeth, a large paper house, paper flowers and more...

The second group, Heath joined us and we did the same process, but this time we didn’t do Little Red Riding Hood. After Medina told the VV walking through the landscape story, we asked the kids to draw what they imagine their journey would be on the way to school. We are not sure if this concept got through, anyway, the kids drew lots of animals and houses and people..which were all in Medina’s story...so..their response was interesting. The kids then made all sorts things, costumes- lots of boys in capes and masks, a paper baby, a present wrapped in a present in a present and all sorts of great things.

- The third group were the kids with the special needs and they were great. In the multi purpose space we all created together lotsof long lines of masking tape everywhere- like a big clothes line.. all three responded to drawing on the paper on the walls and really got into making and throwing paper balls. It was a big long improvisation and they seemed to have a laugh. This group are great to try out sensorial things like touch, smell, taste and making spaces and drawing to communicate.

PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVISATION: After everyone had finished making their paper objects, puppets, props and costumes the kids all gathered in the hall and we did short improvisations in the groups. All sorts of fantastic material emerged. (see below for highlights)

- Gorgeous present wrapped in a present it took ages to unravel and in the end was a crayon! Very nice idea.
- A boy giving birth to a paper baby and lots of the girls dressed in paper dresses running to deliver it
- Deaf relay interpreters next to the MC. Excellent way for the deaf kids to develop interpreting skills from a young age, working with hearing interpreters and also having a role on stage
- Paper axes were cool.
- That the kids mimed opening the curtains
All kids made an entrance and an exit automatically.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VISUAL VERNACULAR: This includes techniques specific to sign language story telling such as,
- Long shot and Close up to give a distance perspective to the story
- Fast and slow motion to slow down or speed up the action to build anticipation as the story unfolds.
- Zooming in and out to gain a variety of perspectives of an object or person.
- Panoramic View to "set the stage" for the story and develop the story environment
- Role shifting to show movements, activities, and communications by various characters and how they interact with all other characters and in their environment in the story.
- Empathy

Introducing the kids to ‘how to use the signing space in front of them as ‘a kind of stage’ and feature actions happening simultaneously’ (Klima and Bellugi: 1979-227 cited Meier, 2002:322 - Using Space and Describing Space in: Meir, R.P, Cormier, K., Quintos- Pozoz, D. (eds.) Modality and Structure in Signed and Spoken Languages. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press). Another great thing is to introduce the kids to tools in how to develop the craft of articulating stories. This includes stating the topic, building elements into the signing space like, pronouns, adjectives, location, singular / plural, gender. Then they will allocate different characters, objects, ideas and how they relate to each other using directional verbs and role shift. Setting up perspective and scale ie: close up, aerial view and the time line including past, present and future. This is important, particularly if the kids do not sign at home. Napier (2006:42) describes ‘sign languages as having a strong tendency to express ideas in the order in which events happen, in a visual chronology (like the logic of a cartoon strip)’ (Napier, J., Mc Kee, R. & Goswell, D. (2006) Sign Language Interpreting- theory and Practise in Australia and New Zealand. Sydney: The Federation Press)

Developing clear communication feedback loops between teachers and artists.

Suggestions and feedback- artists do a write up of the plan of the day and put it up on the wall so the teachers are clear of what is happening in the workshops. Some teachers expressed that they need to be clearer about their roles and what is required. Suggestion that maybe teachers can write anonymous feedback on a PMI chart in the staff room about the workshop they just participated in? Artists attend staff meeting at beginning for discussion about the day and particular issues and/or students/ processes. It would be great to set up strategy so we can have a great flowing relationship between everyone so we can all share expertise and learn from one another. Will be interesting to note what the teachers feel and say.

**Workshop Three, 28 July 2009 (Written by Jodee Mundy)**

Jodee and Sue led the workshops together. Leonie, a puppeteer and maker, came in to observe and meet the kids. She will be facilitating some workshops while Sue is away.
Aims of the workshop

- Develop trust and a sense of play
- Ensemble work
- Nothing is right or wrong
- Introduce imitation skills
- Introduce mime and stylisation of movement and illusion
- Developing skills and confidence in devising stories
- Introducing how to channel emotions through drawing
- Introduce the idea of space- and design
- Working with cardboard boxes and designing your own space/home/cubby
- Using tools like sticky tape, crayons, textas and asking for assistance with cutting
- The lead up to performance and deadlines
- Conventions of theatre such as an MC, a curtain, an interpreter (deaf or hearing), an entrance, a climax, an exit, audience response
- Developing confidence to perform and improvise in front of peers and teachers.
- Clarify and work towards strengthening the relationship between the teachers and artists
- Teachers to participate and be free to play with the kids
- Allow teachers an opportunity to see their students in a different way and vice versa
- Work towards how to evaluate the workshops with the teachers and benefit from their expertise.
- Gather feedback from the teachers

What the artists did

PERFORMING ARTS: In the first workshop, Jodee showed the kids some mime including how to pull a rope. The kids responded well to this and found it challenging too. Then Jodee did pushing and pulling, and the kids pushed and pulled one another and then attempted to do it as mime. The kids responded well to this and some kids really showed signs of talent in this area of physicality. Some of them did find it tiring so, then, Jodee then showed, ‘26 movements of the glass’ which is a stylised way of how to drink out of an invisible glass. This introduced the idea of taking an everyday action and stylising it. This exercise also captured how one can articulate one’s hand and body and break it down into various actions and then learn it as a choreography. The kids loved this one in particular and each did a solo performance trying to remember the sequence. This was a great way to start looking at choreography and performance as a set sequence to remember, like a physical script.

VISUALS AND MAKING: Sue then lead the second half of the workshop. First, she guided the kids through an emotional drawing session- where the kids did dots, lines, etc. but with different emotions such as, sad, happy, calm, angry and so forth. One by one, everyone, spun the dial and chose an emotion from ‘the how are you feeling chart’ then all the kids participated and drew to their hearts content, channelling and feeling the emotions
and seeing how this affected their approach to drawing. Then after that, they all rubbed their charcoal hands all over their faces :) 

Then came the exciting bit of the project, boxes!! Sue and Leonie brought out the boxes and the kids went nuts. They all got inside them, walked around, played and then one by one, in a domino effect, each one began to create their boxes. The kids began designing their boxes, asking the teachers and the artists to cut out windows, holes, doors with the Stanley knives. The kids were very particular with how they wanted them cut which was so great to see them take ownership. For example: _____ made a robot, _____ made a cathouse, _____ and _____ made a mansion, _____ created a circular igloo and there were other shapes like igloos, a 3 storey box house, hallways. It was interesting to see how the kids began to join their boxes together- making tunnels, like a city.

SECOND GROUP: Our approach with the younger ones changed as Jodee felt unsure about teaching mime to them. So she began with chasey- tale and the kids played this. then they formed a circle and Jodee tried to introduce the idea of a VV game, where all the kids were form a ‘group lake’ with their hands and then one by one, pass a sea creature made with the hands. Jodee had never tried this with kids before and it felt like it wasn’t working, so then Jodee asked the kids to do it with their whole body and move around the room – well that worked well ... the kids became crocodiles, sharks, jelly fish, you name it, it was there. They love animals! Sue and Jodee then gave them newspaper to make puppets, costumes and to do a show about the sea. It’s interesting as this group, being so young, still see theatre and fantasy playing as the same thing. For example, the kids who were in the audience would jump up in the middle of some of the other kids performances : ). Also, some of the kids were, ‘Stage Managers’ and one was even a director I think hahaha.. This enthusiasm is fantastic and wonderful and it’s so important throughout the next term to encourage it while also introducing theatre conventions, different type of performance such as the typical proscenium arch style, the theatre in the round, parade structures, free improvisation etc. It’s also important to highlight to the kids the importance of watching and developing skills of how to critique and learn from watching others too. Very interesting! Things made included- some of the boys being pirates man with swords, _____ made a gorgeous fishing rod, _____ and _____ made telescopes which were also peglegs, oh and lots of paper footballs : )

A strategy for these kids is to introduce conventions of performance space and audience space ... perhaps put a line on the floor to show the ‘invisible wall’, boxes to focus the space, torches that light up the performance area... to highlight the difference. Perhaps also working in smaller groups is a good way to unlock this realisation.

Sue led the boxes work with them and they responded really well, and interestingly, in a different way to the older group. The older group had the kids making their own individual work, whereas the kids in the younger group tend to want to do the same things, as if it’s a domino effect .It could be viewed as ‘copying’ or as a great way of the idea being passed along. This began with ______ realising he could made a little peep hole and look outside the box. Then the other kids caught on and wanted to do the same. Then doors and windows etc... It’s interesting this kind of communication that the kids share and connect through. It’s something to investigate further.
THIRD GROUP: Wow these guys are so cool. Amazing how they come up with material and how much they will inform the design of the show. So, ______ and Sue discovered the boxes, if made in an oval form, could be something you can move around in. It was as if they created a steamroller like a giant caterpillar. Sue and ______ went nuts and had a fantastic laugh together. Jodee and Leonie played with ______ and ______. Yosum is opening up a lot to us and is more interactive with us and smiling. ______ too, he had fun and loves throwing paper balls. This group are quite amazing because their responses can be quite abstract and sophisticated which is so inspiring. Ideas that came from them included – a hailstorm of balls, a cardboard steamroller, discovery of looking through the windows, winder, rapper, thrashers...and again, spaces that you crawl through. This group are spatially creative and very present with their senses, so some sensorial stuff with them will be great to explore too... like taste, sight, smell, texture and more.

FEEDBACK FROM THE TEACHERS: Jodee left a feedback page on the staffroom desk but it seems the teachers were too busy with Parent Teacher day to be able to write their views. Deb said she would try her best to ask the teachers to give us feedback. Is attending the staff meeting a viable option? Need to work on this one to get systems in place.

Workshop Four, 4 August 2009 (Written by Jodee Mundy)

Jodee and Leonie led the workshops together and it was great working together!

Aims of the workshop

- Ensemble work
- Introduce the notion of emotional levels
- Introduce shadow puppetry
- Drawing and designing a shadow puppet
- How to make a shadow puppet
- Using tools like sticky tape, crayons, textas and asking for assistance with cutting
- The lead up to performance and deadlines
- Introduction to Shadow puppetry and the art of manipulating shadow puppets
- Scale by using the light
- Narrative and rhythm, expression of puppets
- Developing skills of the convention of theatre – (on stage/back stage and audience)
- Developing performance analysis skills and constructive critique skills to peers
- Developing confidence to perform and improvise in front of peers and teachers.
- Clarify and work towards strengthening the relationship between the teachers and artists
- Artists to inform teachers what is happening before each class and agree strategies
- Teachers to participate and be free to play with the kids
- Teachers to communicate with artists and vice versa about what to do with kids
- Allow teachers an opportunity to see their students in a different way and vice versa
- Work towards how to evaluate the workshops with the teachers and benefit from their expertise.
- Gather feedback from the teachers

What the artists did

DRAMA: In the first workshop, Jodee did some yoga with the kids as a warm up – this included partner work and some basic stretches. Then we did some ensemble work where we formed a circle and did some big group hug kind of things. After that we played an ‘emotional levels’ game. One by one, the kids picked an emotion (ie: crying, anger, happy, sad, nervous etc) and then we did a big group exercise where we built up the emotion on a scale of 1 to 5 and then reversed from 5-1. This exercise is a great one for understanding the complexity of each stage of an emotion- ie: from a little tear, to crying, sobbing, wailing then hailing. The aim of this exercise is to introduce the idea of layering emotions to a climax which is what happens in theatre. The kids responded really well to this and it was great to see how the kids all responded at the extreme level of 5. All angry and screaming around the room, or excited – and jumping up and down… the kids really grasped this one well.

SHADOW PUPPETRY: Then we moved into the puppet theatre realm. Leonie led this part with the communication assistance of Jodee. We took the kids into the room next door and they all gasped with disbelief when they saw the little shadow puppet theatre set. Leonie did a small demonstration of the shadow work, first by using her own silhouette and then showing a few shadow puppets. The kids lapped it up. They were so keen. So we went next door and told them to draw their own puppet. Leonie explained it was important to keep it simple as the more complex it is, the harder it is to cut and make. The kids set off to work, with the assistance of the teachers, who also made puppets themselves.

We had dinosaurs, snakes, blobs, butterflies, some figures, a king, The End, smiley faces, a dog, cat, caterpillar , a cat, a house, spider, snake and a bat... Jodee and Leonie used masking tape on the floor to show separation between audience and performance space. Jodee introduced the idea of ‘audience’ (as people who sit and watch) and about the performance space and the notion of the 4th wall. The kids worked in pairs or threes and experimented with shadow puppetry. It was great... some worked out how to increase and reduce the scale of the images. Some used rhythm to convey emotion... After each showing, the performers would bow and cross the line.

They asked the kids to evaluate, watch the other showings, pick something they liked and give feedback. One by one the kids expressed what they thought was positive about each other’s work. Again the idea of emotional levels was introduced as something you can build up and decrease.
SECOND GROUP: With this group we played ‘cat and mouse’ which was led by the kids. They told us how to play it. Then we did emotional levels... it was interesting their response. One of the teachers suggested we just do it from 1-3 (as opposed to 1-5) and this worked well. The kids did build up and decrease well. The kids loved making the shadow puppets. There was some fantastic stuff... Dinosaurs, giraffes, bomb like structures, lion, super heroes with capes and cellophane, _____’s monster- Jurassic scenes. We did a bit of feedback after each showing, however, cause this is a bigger group we moved very quickly through each pair. It would be better to have more time next time for all of them.

THIRD GROUP: We played with the shadow puppets. All three were really engaged and calm today. _____ made his own shadow puppet with the assistance of Leonie which is great. He was calm and engaged. Leonie brought in one of the cupboard boxes and started to play with the idea of shadow puppetry inside one of the windows with ______. A nice offer. _____ got his hands on Leonie’s camera and was taking photos non stop. He actually took some really awesome shots. _____ enjoyed watching the shadow puppets, played with them a bit, played ball, bang the drum and gave Jodee lots of cuddles. He was really affectionate with her. _____ also banged the drum and bit and for a while there we had shadow puppetry accompanied with music... which was really nice. It was a very calm session. _____ wrapped himself a bit with masking tape, however, was not really into it as much and was keen to engage in other things.

Feedback from the teachers

Mel, Leonie and Jodee attended the staff meeting on the 4th August. The teachers were great. They said they really liked how we briefed them quickly before each session of what was happening and how to negotiate issues if some of the kids are playing up or distracting other students. Jodee said to let the artists know before disciplining the kids, so then they are prepared. Artists and teachers agree that communicating is the best way, to keep the lines open. All very happy with the process and will continue to keep giving feedback. Jodee and artists will attend staff meeting for half an hour every few weeks. See some other comments below that teachers left on butchers paper left in staff room following session on 28th July 2009 All anonymous and typed as written.

- “The kids are loving the sessions and are very motivated to attend”
- “At the end of an activity the kids are encouraged to help clean up”
- “That whatever is made in a session not be destroyed so the teachers/kids can follow up with language experience later”
- “Has been great fun! Kids loved making things out of paper, then creating a story out of what they made. VV (visual vernacular) games – fantastic!”
- “Kids really enjoyed the box activity today. All were very creative.”
- “Could someone from the program come to staff meeting to talk about their aims, idea, why things are destroyed & binned etc.” (two extra ticks added to this) response from Robyn ”Regular attendance at the staff meetings have been scheduled. 1st 20-30mins perhaps fortnightly”
- “Love being able to join in as participant but my role as a teacher demands that I interfere at times”
  (Two extra ticks added to this)
- “Chn with profound additional needs require consistency, within the fun activities. Also need guidelines”

**Workshop Five, 11 August 2009 (Written by Jodee Mundy)**

Jodee and Leonie led the workshops together and it was great working together! Anna and Sue came by to watch...

**Aims of the workshop**

- Ensemble work
- Develop shadow puppetry skills
- Develop understanding of levels of emotion
- Play more with the puppets and the art of manipulating shadow puppets
- Scale by using torch light
- Narrative and rhythm, expression of puppets
- Developing skills of the convention of theatre- (on stage/back stage and audience)
- Developing performance analysis skills and constructive critique skills to peers
- Developing confidence to perform and improvise in front of peers and teachers.
- Kids to continue making their boxes
- Develop their approach to designing their boxes
- Clarify and work towards strengthening the relationship between the teachers and artists
- Artists to inform teachers what is happening before each class and agree strategies
- Teachers to participate and be free to play with the kids
- Teachers to communicate with artists and vice versa about what to do with kids
- Allow teachers an opportunity to see their students in a different way and vice versa
- Work towards how to evaluate the workshops with the teachers and benefit from their expertise.
- Gather feedback from the teachers

**What the artists did**

FIRST GROUP: In the first workshop, Jodee did a warm up, some stretching, then did the clap and jump game. Then we did some ensemble work where we formed a circle and did some big group improvisation where we mimed throwing an object which kept changing shape, weight and size. That was a lot of fun. Then Jodee asked 3 of the students to get up and improvise a scene in a restaurant... the three were instructed to use emotional levels 1-5.
The first time they did it was a pretty ‘safe and conservative’ performance. Jodee asked the group to give feedback and asked if they felt they reached level 5 (the extreme state of emotion). The group said NO!! So they did it again and this time really exaggerated and played as actors. It was good to see there was some difference as they understood the task. Then another three did the same exercise set in a 'Hospital'. Again Jodee asked them to do it again and there was a minor improvement on their approach to acting. Leonie did a little demonstration showing one of the shadows inside the boxes. Then she asked the kids to start working on cutting out more windows and doors in their boxes and cover it with paper, making paper windows, for the shadow puppets in a few weeks’ time. The kids are developing their boxes into tunnels, a tower, a yert, a house. It will be exciting to see them painting them later down the track. The kids packed up and the bell went. So this is where Mark and Leonie can pick up on in two weeks’ time.

SECOND GROUP: We played Duck, Duck Goose – a game the kids love. Jodee tends to ask the kids what game they would like to play as it’s a nice way to start doing something they love. After that we formed a circle and played, ‘Pass the imaginary present’ – which changes size and shape from one person to the next. After that, we played ‘jump and clap’ which they responded to well. After that, we asked the kids to sit down and 2 kids to pick 4 shadow puppets and do a short performance in the shadow puppet theatre. The kids at this stage got very demanding and a little bit out of control. After each pair, Jodee and Leonie would ask for feedback and the kids did get up one by one and say what they liked. I think this is a good way to work as it gives them all a structure and the chance to think about other people's work, and not just themselves all the time. Some of the feedback the kids gave included things like, visual rhythm, the way the puppet moved, the way the torchlight moved, narrative, humour. It was great to see them giving feedback and attempting to articulate what they had just seen and why they liked it. Some of the images that came up from the kids included:

- A puppet that waves hello.
- An angry lion trying to eat the man
- A surreal puppet man who keeps falling backwards
- Happy creatures with lots of torch lights dancing behind
- A creature entering an alien’s eye...with flashing lights behind
- After that, the kids got into making their boxes, cutting more windows, making paper doors and windows and preparing for their work to be done in two weeks’ time with Mark and Leonie.

MARK AND LEONIE – It really became apparent that the kids need support in how to develop and devise a shadow puppet play. Leonie and I feel that breaking the kids up into 4 groups- (with teachers to assist in facilitating) the kids need to come up with a basic story, a storyboard and then rehearse their puppet show... and then perform it. I think this would be a great task for you both to do. Also Mark, there is great opportunity for making paper sculptures ... and lighting shadow puppets behind.
MEDINA AND ANNA – For you both, the kids need more tools in how to devise a play using different characters, VV, movement. They need to rehearse it and then perform it. Other things that may assist you is using mask, paper costumes, doing a shadow show with the whole body – even a dance here Anna could be great). I will talk to you both on Friday.

THIRD GROUP: We worked with about 5 torches and created a light world on the ceiling. It was fun. Then Leonie and _____ made a paper dress – and had a puppet behind... it looked cool. Jodee and _____ made a paper flower with purple cellophane and lit it from underneath. It looked cool. _____ was loving the fabric and found that the fabric could go through the puppet theatre. We ripped the paper screen in the puppet theatre and peered through to the other side which was a great surprise for ______.

Feedback from the teachers

Jodee and Leonie attended the staff meeting... Teachers responded positively and all nodded when Jodee said that the kids are getting used to us now and are more demanding. They all laughed. Jodee said that the kids need to be reminded to have manners, say thank you etc, smile even, as they are getting full on. As a way to manage this, Jodee suggested that the second group be split into 2 big groups between Mark and Leonie and then swap them half way through as it will be easier to manage and keep their attention. For the younger group, one teacher suggested that Leonie should work with one of the teachers who would then interpret for her, as the language between Leonie and the kids is not getting through. This will assist Jodee and Mark too so they don’t have to support as much. All the teachers know and are ready for Medina and Anna next week, and are looking forward to meeting Mark when he will be working with Leonie.

Workshop Six, 18 August 2009 (Written by Anna)

Medina and Anna led the workshops together, it was great to work together again but this time in a very different context!

Aims of the workshop

- Working in pairs, teams and individually
- Develop awareness of their own bodies and how they move within this space
- Develop understanding of movement and dance as a performance tool
- Use object manipulation
- Develop an understanding of handshapes and the different visual possibilities/Auslan signs from a specific handshape
- Developing confidence to perform and improvise in front of students and teachers
- Ask for feedback from teachers

**What the artists did**

FIRST GROUP: Medina and Anna introduced ourselves to the group and asked the kids to introduce themselves again as we are still pretty new to the kids. Anna led a warm-up asking the kids to walk around the room in any direction they wanted without bumping into each other, then some stretching of the neck, wrists, upper body, hips and legs. Anna got the kids to do some pair work to maximise stretching and building trust in others. Activities included: holding hands facing each other then leaning backwards with hands and legs straight, facing in opposite directions with backs to each other and arms twisted bending legs to go down then back up. This then led into a body percussion session with Anna showing some simple percussion rhythms stomping feet on the floor and clapping. The kids were really good! I asked if they know anything about hip hop. They said yes yes yes I do! But were too shy to show us! I showed them a little dance routine and taught them that routine, ending with the kids doing a little performance. All a bit out of rhythm and sync but they loved it and that's the important thing!

Medina did the handshape game which the kids improvised well creating different visual pictures from that handshape. We also did the pointing game which they responded really well to.

Lastly, we did some improvisation with them doing the “tableaux” game. Four volunteers in three different groups acted out different scenarios like a wedding (bride walking to the groom, bride and groom exchanging vows, bride running away saying I don’t love you, I love him pointing to the best man) a birthday party (singing happy birthday, eating the cake, a food fight) going to the hairdressers. The first two performances were... a bit too rushed and flat. The third performance went on longer and with more emotion and expression. Feedback from the students was “Funny! Good!”

One girl got up and did a solo performance, miming a day of her life in the Philippines – rowing in the boat, walking, looking at trees, picking fruits?nuts?flowers? from a tree.

_____ then couldn’t resist doing a solo performance too! He switched roles between a boy throwing a ball to a dog, and acting out the dog running and catching the ball. The ball then became a Frisbee...

We ended the workshop with some stretches to cool down.

THE SECOND GROUP: _____ and _____ started with a warm up playing the run and freeze game. The kids really loved that and had lots of fun. We asked the kids to improvise by not to run, but to jump instead, as well as to move like cats (this was an idea from one of the kids), to move like frogs. Anna did some stretching with them and the pair activities we did with the first group but this group found it to be too hard. Anna did some simple body percussion, while they loved stomping the floors and feeling the vibrations they found it hard to keep up the rhythm with others.
Medina did the handshape game, with this group we did more Auslan signs rather than VV but this is a good thing as it’s helping the kids increase their Auslan knowledge. After that, we did some improvisation doing the Machine Game. This encouraged the kids to be creative thinking of random movements and how other people can think of a movement to complement the other movement (hope this makes sense?!?) Anna and Medina encouraged them to make their movements bigger and with face expressions too, which they did well with encouragement from us and the teachers.

We then asked the kids what game they wanted to play. Cat and Mouse they said so we played that for a while, there was lots of laughing. We ended the workshop with some stretches to cool down.

THIRD GROUP: We worked with _____, _____and _____using different props – hats, masks, clothes, shoes... they tried on every hat and mask looking at themselves in the mirror, at one stage Yosum was dressed in a skirt, crazy 70s style t-shirt, with a hat and a mask and white high heels! Then Anna got some drums out; Anna and Medina banged on the drums while _____ and _____ lied on the floor right next to the drums feeling the rhythms, this seemed to have a relaxing effect on them. _____ was smiling and nodding her head. _____ and _____ banged on the drums for a while too.

FEEDBACK FROM THE TEACHERS: There wasn’t a staff meeting today. This week is meeting-free! Between the workshops, we got some feedback from the teachers and this is what they had to say...

- Your workshops are awesome! It’s really good the kids are doing movement and physical activities because many of them don’t do a lot of physical activities at home. It also keeps them occupied and helps avoid them getting out of control.
- The kids in the second group were well-behaved today, maybe because there was a lot of moving around for them
- It’s great for the kids to have two deaf artists working directly with them
- Puppetry was a little boring - this is something we need to explore to make this interesting and to make many so no one misses out

(Anna and Medina’s feeling about today – we were totally worn out by the end of the day! We thought doing movement for two hours might be a bit too much, maybe worthwhile doing some craft-making activities in the last 30mins?)

Workshop Seven, 25 August 2009 (Written by Jodee Mundy)

Mark and Leonie led the workshops together. The focus was on storyboarding and collaboration within groups of five and six. The students used their shadow puppets combined to draw up stories which were then blown up to a larger scale drawing.
Aims of the workshop

- Develop trust and a sense of play
- Develop skills in working together well, building respect for each other
- Developing characters
- Developing storytelling skills
- Developing skills in sharing and collaboration, and taking turns
- Developing respect for each others work
- Expand their vision and techniques of telling stories
- Nothing is right or wrong
- Developing skills and confidence in devising stories
- Using tools like overhead projectors, crayons, textas
- Developing confidence to perform and improvise in front of peers and teachers.
- Clarify and work towards strengthening the relationship between the teachers and artists
- Teachers to participate and be free to play with the kids
- Allow teachers an opportunity to see their students in a different way and vice versa
- Work towards how to evaluate the workshops with the teachers and benefit from their expertise.
- Gather feedback from the teachers

What the artists did

STORYTELLING: The students were gathered in a circle and each were asked questions about their shadow puppet. This led to some very interesting descriptions of characters. The group was then split in half to work with one storyboard to combine the characters in a story. One group told the story of one princess who had two boys interested in her affections. They had a fight to see who would be her love. A bat came down and flew her away. The snake and the wobbly worm and other animals went looking for her and brought her back. She lived happily ever after with her prince (______’s puppet) we spoke of what would happen to _____’s puppet who didn’t get her love, apparently he was happy enough

Today the school had a photograph session so the first class was interrupted at different points. This gave Leonie and Mark time to rearrange the room so that when the students returned they could immediately step into the next part of the project, and begin constructing their large scale storyboard. When the students came back into the music room, the room had been rearranged with large pieces of paper on the wall with an overhead projector for each group to play with.

Some of the discoveries that were made by the groups were that their puppets placed down on the projector would cast a large shadow they could trace around, others came up with ideas of one person holding the puppet as still as possible while another student traced around it. They discovered that jumping near the equipment, made the puppet slip out of the lines they were tracing, moving in front of the projector, meant for those few
seconds the image was lost. In making these discoveries they were learning about shadows in a variety of ways and what was required for each other.

The students are learning how to tell stories in groups with more than one puppet, on a large scale picture storyboard. This will help them find ways to tell their own stories, and give them confidence to be able to create a story and then create the puppets to go with it.

SECOND GROUP: Some of the second group were still getting photos taken, so we thought it best to have a quick game outside on the basketball courts. We played dragons treasure and got the fast energy out of their system in the blowy wind. Dragon’s treasure can also be called Red Light, or What’s The Time Mr Wolf.... The slight difference with this game was to creep up on the dragon feeling a particular emotion that was chosen by the students. When the dragon turns around everyone freezes. Those who are caught moving have to start again. Anger, excitement, fear were some of the emotions they worked with. It was great to see their energy outside was so different once they came back into the music room.

We stayed in the music room for all of the day, due to the photographs being taken. The energy was very different to the spaciousness of the multi purpose room. It seemed a lot more focused. We put the triangle masking tape line on the ground for the kids to sit on and it worked again. They were very attentive, and were very good at listening to each other tell the story of their shadow puppets. One of the teachers took the list of what each child said about their characters and is going to turn it into a book

A line on the floor seems to indicate a good structure for a better attention span. The second group was split into three groups. This created strength in the stories that the students could tell, as it gave more time to focus on each child. I did forget to inform the teachers in the second group about the process of the class, and yet by copying both Mark and I they were able to work out, what we were doing. Phew. This was mentioned at the teachers meeting, and noted. Particularly important as there were three groups so we really needed the teachers to be on the ball, which they were.

Both the classes responded well to the exercises. They were all able to understand that we were making large scale stories. And everyone remained really focused for the duration of the class.

THIRD GROUP: ______ is fascinated by the light and shadows that are created. So far we have discovered light within paper and images that can move when the paper travels with lights and shadows. He plonked himself in a corner, with a large piece of paper around him and was happy to stay there as long as there was light and moving shadows. Leonie handed him a torch and he continued exploring with the paper. Torn up bits of paper thrown from high to float to the ground, and land on the OHP. He was into blowing and collecting and blowing again. Ali attempted some drawings on the large paper, with assistance. _____ played with wrapping himself up with masking tape. Mark changed the course, by wrapping himself up with glad wrap and then taping around the glad
The effect of the cast when it came off with the light shining through created caverns of light, which later enjoyed playing with by examining them with his fingers, and peeking through the hole.

FEEDBACK FROM THE TEACHERS: Mainly the feedback of today was to keep the teachers informed as to what we are planning for the class, so that they can assist us in as many ways possible. They are also encouraged to ask questions if they are unsure, particularly as there is generally a changeover half way through the class, and sometimes it's difficult to stop and explain what we are doing.

Workshop Eight, 1 September 2009

Medina and Anna led the workshop together which was a great day altogether despite a few dramas...

Aims of the workshop

- Develop awareness of their bodies and how they move within this space
- Develop understanding of movement, dance and face expressions as a performance tool
- Working as a group, in pairs and on their own
- Developing confidence to perform and improvise in front of students and teachers
- Giving each other feedback
- Teachers to participate in the workshops and ask for feedback from teachers
- Develop storytelling skills using Auslan, body movement, face expressions
- Explore the possibilities in shadow puppetry/movement
- Create props to use in performances (in this case, streamers)

What the artists did

FIRST GROUP: Medina and Anna were warmly welcomed by the kids who all remembered our names and we felt bad because we couldn't remember all of their names! We started in a big circle with the kids introducing themselves and showing their sign names. We also shared our favourite food – this turned out to be a good activity because some of them didn't know the correct Auslan sign (e.g. wrong handshape) so this was increasing their Auslan knowledge.

Anna led a warm up, walking in a circle then jogging, walking on toes, heels, sides of feet. Anna asked the kids to vary the style of walking

- walk freely, tall
- walk through mud, deep and sticky
- walk barefoot on hot burning sand
- walk on slippery rocks
- walk along throwing a ball in the air and catching it
- walk on the moon

The kids seemed to enjoy this activity and there was a lot of encouragement from the teachers which was just fantastic... then we all made some streamers, everyone were working really well together sharing papers, coloured streamers that we allocated to them, they were quite engrossed in this activity. We were inspired with Mark and Leonie's idea of going outside – great idea. We all went outside and let the kids have a really good run around the playground with their streamers. Then Medina got them into single file and did a bit of a choreographed dance/movement swinging the streamers in the wind.

We went inside (and this is when the wind pushed the door BANG onto Medina's index finger – ouch!) while Medina was resting in the hallway, Anna led the next activity...

Anna did the "I Love You" improvisation game where a person sits in front of the class on a chair. The remaining people were to have a turn to go up to the person sitting in the chair saying "I love you" in Auslan. The object is for the first person not to laugh. The kids were encouraged to use Auslan with exaggerated face expressions, then later to try to minimise use of Auslan and use body movement/theatre to express the "I love you" message. Some kids were a bit self conscious at first but later they were begging for a turn determined to make the first person laugh. It was good to see the kids express and feel warmth towards each other; there was lots of laughing here! (from the audience not the first person) there were lots of marriage proposals where they would get down to one knee and present a ring, or pretending to be cats rubbing up against the first player's legs, and even a ballet dance!

By then Medina had recovered, and asked the kids to do some storytelling, trying not to use too much Auslan. Medina showed a beautiful example, and the kids had a turn each, some using their streamers (dancing from the girls, sword battles from the boys) some performed in pairs... ______ told a couple of stories about Philippines again which was great.

We continued with the storytelling until the end of the workshop. On reflection of this, I wish I had thought to ask the kids for their feedback on each other stories, whether they understood them, what they liked about it, what they didn’t like about it. Oh well, I will remember this for next time!

SECOND GROUP: Medina and Anna did the same workshop we did for the first group. We did the walking warm up and varying the styles of walking but with this group we did it in two lines not a circle. Some of the kids were a bit shy at first, but soon got right into it though they were moving across the room really quickly (when they were asked to pretend to be walking the moon or on slippery rocks) Anna then led some warm up exercises on the spot like jumping up and down, running on the spot, softly slapping our arms, legs, torso, across the chest. Anna started the Mr Wolf game asking kids for some suggestions on how to vary the style of walking; some suggestions were being lions, being monsters.
Medina then taught the kids how to make streamers and they had loads of fun doing this. We decided not to take the second group outside because we were worried they might get out of control (and we didn’t want more black fingers for the artists!) instead we asked them to do some solo or duo performances in front of each other using their streamers. Again, there were some dancing, leaping, twirling from the girls and more sword and gun battles from the boys.

We all went into the music room and did some shadow puppetry. Medina would give the kids, one at a time, an animal and they were to improvise that animal with their hands and the rest of the kids had to guess which animal. There were a lot of beautiful imagery and the kids really enjoyed the visual sensations of shadow puppetry. Later, working in pairs Anna would give them a situation like a ship and dolphin at sea, getting a haircut but the hairdresser dropping a spider in his hair, trees, flowers and butterflies...Before we knew it, the time was up...

THIRD GROUP: It was only _____ and _____ this week. We blew up some balloons and played the drums. Holding on the balloons, they could feel the vibrations and their faces immediately perked up. After playing with the drums for a while, we turned off the lights and played with torches – creating a light dance on the ceiling, the walls, and the floor, on each other. _____ had her torch light on her hand and was fixated on her fingers for a long time. We played the drums again while looking at the light dance on the ceiling. That was great!

Medina and Anna didn’t stay for the staff meeting; the teachers said they would email us feedback if there was any. Need to follow up on this...

Many thanks to Mel who brought all the materials for us!

**Workshop Nine, 8 September 2009**

Leonie and Sue led the workshop together in the morning with the years 5 and 6’s.

**Aims of the workshop**

- Develop awareness of their bodies and how they move within this space
- Develop understanding of movement, dance and face expressions as a performance tool
- Working as a group, in pairs and on their own
- Developing confidence to perform and improvise in front of students and teachers
- Continue developing skills in collaboration, sharing space, and respecting each other work
- To encourage pride in the work they can do together as a team
What the artists did

FIRST GROUP: Sue was greeted heartily by all the children with big hugs, and screams from the tops of their lungs. She led the first part of the workshop by playing games in a circle. One person pulls a crazy body shape and funny face and walks over to someone, they in turn cross over the circle and trade places, and so on. The zombie game was a hit, and as people found ways to never get caught, the rules changed accordingly. One person is in as a zombie and walks slowly with their arms outstretched. People have to avoid getting touched, but if touched they too turn into a zombie and then the zombies increase until there is no one left. Lots of fun.

They then continued with their large scale story boards. Which turned into marvelously large and colourful pictures. There were some issues that were raised in the groups when some people found it difficult to collaborate. Problems arose where people disrespected the light being cast as someone was tracing, and others got impatient when they wanted to draw. Some puppets were lost and there were drawings in the small storyboards that needed fresh puppets to be made. A lot of improvising was necessary, but everyone made achievements as the drawings were stuck up in the multipurpose room like wallpaper as they were made. The students were rather pleased to see their pictures on display, all ready for the next day to welcome the minister, Lyn Kosky to the school and show her the great work the students have been doing.

Unfortunately, Sue was only able to stay until 11, Leonie had a throbbing headache and Mark had woken up with the flue so was unable to attend. It all ended at recess. Sorry for the disappointment to the junior classes. I think Sue was making it up to the younger group by including them in Wednesday activities...

Workshop, 20 October 2009 (Written by Sue)

Jodee and Sue ran through ideas for project with Robyn and Carolyn before school started then rushed into the first session.

FIRST GROUP: We did a warm up in a circle – holding hands, sitting while holding hands – stretching ourselves and our limitations. Then slow decline to the floor and up again to a count of 10 – my Auslan numbers very rusty – completely misunderstood the number 5. The kids enjoyed the control of this and the challenge of doing the slow down and up to fewer and fewer numbers. Nice focused exercise which led seamlessly into VV work. Jodee noticed an amazing build in understanding from last week as they started their VV – simple people exercise – fingers on hand then upper body then back to fingers – we went round the circle, each doing a different small scale/big scale scenario. Then the same with animals – this time not around circle but with whoever wanted to – still touched on everyone but gave people more time to think and plan. Group volunteering ideas, everyone had a go even though the animals were a much harder task. Excellent work from Deaf teacher with the blonde hair... need to clarify her name. who said it was her FAVOURITE thing. We did any animal and then Australian animals.
We put three of the animals together into a small story structure – mouse hunted by snake who is hunted in turn by kookaburra. (I did a nasty block during this – bad! Sorry Jodee)

Split into threes – each smaller group creating a short sequence with Australian animals using the VV technique.
2: Kangaroo and Rabbit eating grass, peacefully. Dingo is on the prowl. Rabbit gets scared and hops into Kangaroo’s pouch. Dingo pounces and misses as Kangaroo hops away.
3: Three kangaroos – two greys and one BIG red with muscles. All eating. Big red pushes one grey who lands on her back. Big Red pushes the other grey who also lands on his back. Big Red celebrates and jumps up and down.

Jodee asked all the groups to repeat their scenes and we all saw a big improvement and new ideas each time. They watched the VV from Kampot after this and were keenly interested, commenting and noticing different things about the faces and techniques of the Cambodian students. Then we spent ½ hour on ideas for the ‘Show’ on November 26 – talking through the plan then walking through the plan from the beginning – HEAPs of great ideas.

- Name of the show (to be decided) outside
- Crawl tunnel from front door (kids’ entrance) make the entrance verandah also a tunnel – paper on sides shredded paper too. Tunnel twists and curves. Holes in tunnel walls to see through – flaps to lift, seeing kids dancing, fish, water, shadows etc
- Paper on the windows so they can’t see in.
- A map. Tour guides dressed as pirates and brides (first workshop).
- Puppets in library doorway – small scene as audience passes
- Moon and stars suspended, black/dark space – torches to see your way
- Entrance to art rooms a castle, tunnel ends. Hanging things in multi-purpose room, strips hanging in layers or rows, big projection on wall, a big chair that appears, ghosts, projected images, hand puppets in the kitchen, video in storage room, lines of colour on the walls, different coloured strips of newspaper
- In drama room shadow puppets and video showing

And the ideas kept coming except the bell rang so we had to stop – lots of enthusiasm and energy. They got it, they loved it.

SECOND GROUP: warm up in a circle – hands, faces, bodies. interspersed with VV exercises – animals to start – getting idea of little and big upper body stuff. Cutting the exercise up with wiggle time. Jodee likes this. Did a short grandma’s footsteps with _____ as IT because he was feeding. Idea from _____ – everyone be animals as they crept up. Usual sprint to the end with a potential fracas between _____ and ______. ______ was IT but was being unfair so we cut it short after the game and went to making things – ______ nearly cracked it because he couldn’t be IT but cheered up immediately once he understood we were to make things. He was our helper getting boxes out.
BOXES were back in the room. Kids loved it – tape, drawing doors and windows, adding extra things to roofs, tapping all the adults for help – eek a bit over whelming until they all settled down and got used to waiting their turn. First anxiety about where their houses were, and starting immediately became a nice exploration and shared play – compromises over entrances and exits had to be reached because they all joined their constructions together into one bit block. Except for ______ who made her own, very beautiful, aerated triple building. They were all very loath to leave!

THIRD GROUP: (SWANS) came in full of energy – ______ started a bit rough and apparently ______ was being very naughty that day but they all settled down. ______ LOVED the boxes especially ______’s and really it stood up to an amazing amount of bashing around. We had gold string, masking tape (of course) and more boxes and textas. ______ was inside a box drawing – great sound coming from the box with the invisible artist. Love the idea of internal worlds – places you can’t see that make sound or have scenes within. Not so great for these kids though – for another project maybe city of riddls... have to steal it.

______ and I created a ball sculpture on the arm of his chair – he loved grabbing the ball as I held it out and holding it in place as I stuck it down. We kept that going for ages until he had this huge bulging construction on one armrest. Heaps of laughter and peaceful concentration. ______ found the masking tape and unwound for a long strip, loving the feel of the tape as it stretched out and then wound himself up as usual – this time with a tight cocoon around his legs. Jodee worked closely with him and ______ signed to her can you please help me? He held her hand as she got him out of the box and started to cut him free – a process he loves. It’s become a ritual activity for ______ – the tape, the length, the winding, the cocoon, the cutting free.

We invited them to come in and play with the box city the kids had made. They went nuts! In and out of boxes, closing doors, crawling through the tunnels with shrieks and squeals of joy. Seeing this was a perfect reminder to allow for spaces that provide freedom of movement and instinctive responses to materials and objects – seeing children move and discover, engage in plays with each other and with spaces – little bodies in tiny spaces. The whole construction held up pretty well – ______’s beautiful structure was perhaps the strongest because it was mostly holes. After they left we had a beautiful, quiet, focused half hour and the three boys were calm and really enjoying themselves. ______ was doing intricate designs on his box and asking his helper to cut shapes for him. – something she was excited to see.

Jodee and I went to staff meeting and talked through the plan and showed the dvds: One Day in Kampot, One day in Furlong Park and then the VV one - we watched the staff watching it on the laptop – lovely to see people watching something and wondering what they were seeing – another nice spying idea. Robyn is so great and the staff seem totally on board with the idea. It’s not new to them to use the whole space or to do processional performance/installation. Trudy is amazing.
The teachers are playing alongside children, trusting the process and us a lot more and are seeing kids do things differently or for the first time.

Melbourne cup week – we should spend a day sorting everything and seeing what we have and what we need to make as we won’t be having kids that week – a real chance to take stock of the production needs and what materials we have left.
Phew – biggy!

Workshop, 27 October 2009 (Written by Jodee Mundy)

FIRST GROUP: The day was rescheduled a bit because of basketball surgeries – so Sue and Jodee began with the SWANS at 9:00am.

Sue laid out cut out ovals of paper along the floor- to me it looked like looking over clouds. There was also a table covered with paper and masking tape and paper balls.

______ and ______ and a new girl were there. ______ and Jodee begun by walking on the paper clouds – ______ shining the torch on each one. Then after that, they did his weekly ritual of him getting the tape and unraveling it and walking backwards – making a long strip of tape between them. They then hung the tape between the walls and stuck the paper clouds to the strips of tape. Jodee spent most of her time with ______ under the table – sticking strips of tape and hanging balls and shining torches at the table above...great ideas for installation. He was very chilled and we enjoyed ourselves. Because I was under the table I didn’t see much of what ______ did – Sue can you fill in this gap? I did see that the new girl (name?) was very shy and Sue managed to get her to do some drawing... She held the pen and Sue rotated a sheet of cardboard round and round as the girl was drawing circles... she enjoyed this and held her pen tighter and tighter as Sue spun the cardboard round and round. Later on, Jodee hung out with her and they held hands. A nice bonding moment. ______ was taking photos.

10:00am – meeting with Mel – great to see her!! The three of us had a planning session for the show – 26th November... materials, logistics, how many projectors, invites, and more!!

SECOND GROUP- (OLDER GROUP): Intensive VV work – it’s challenging doing this work with kids so young – however they have made great progress and are making leaps and bounds with this work. They did solo/ pair work and presented these. We did these scenes in preparation to start finalizing the scenes to be linked to the Cambodian video. Jodee will select scenes and add a few more – Sue suggested that some kids be trees / landscape / houses / along the way of the journey. We are thinking to ask ______ or ______ to play the main character at this point.
Animals
- _____ did a kangaroo
- _____ did a frog
- _____ did a frilled neck lizard
- _____ did a kitten
- _____ did a magpie
- _____ did a koala
- _____ did a crocodile
- _____ did a horse
- _____ did an echidna
- _____ did ??

Types of transport
- Hot air balloon
- Bicycle
- Boat fishing
- Ambulance
- Army truck
- Surfing

We need to develop these more - trams, type of landscapes, temperature, Jodee to send thru a brief soon and to discuss with Sue next Wednesday about directing brief – also to bounce ideas with Heath and Jai via email too… for their input.

3rd GROUP- (YOUNGER GROUP): Duck, duck goose. Continuing making and reinforcing the cardboard boxes. A few little battles amongst neighbors in particular - _____ was a bit of a bossy boots and Jodee left the kids to resolve their own issue of who wanted to be next door as she felt she didn’t want to give the kids the opportunity to manipulate adults… and they could work it out themselves. Haha We had to be strict with them which was tough. They continued cutting and pasting newspaper onto their homes. _____ still beautifully making her home with such detail! _____ made an awesome cardboard clock and a chimney out of a drinking straw.

Workshop, 10 November 2009 (Written by Sue and Jodee)

Well what a huge day. With two weeks to go to the show- the pressure was on. Sue, Jodee and Leonie worked really hard! With the deadline coming to a head and lots of kids and stuff to handle…we hung in there. Now and then Sue and Jodee looked at one another with, 'omg how will we get through all of this' and laughed with relief…and continued on…great to have Leonie there to support everything. She really did a lot of work, reinforcing boxes, painting, getting structures solid. Gavin, a photographer, came in and took photos of the first two sessions. A lovely man, had all the kids asking him what his name was. Lucky he knew how to spell his name
OLDER GROUP: We began by gathering the group together and talking about how the show was due to open in two weeks time (!) All the kids were psyched and ready for a big session. We explained that we were to split the groups, that the majority would work in the MPP room to paint their boxes, along with Sue, Leonie and…teachers ??…..Deb and… whilst, individuals would be asked to co me in to the small drama room and work with Jodee, Melissa and Trudy to start rehearsing the VV connection to Cambodia

VV WORK: Jodee, with the support of Melissa and Trudy, began by working with ______, ______ and ______. ______ is playing the lead role.

______ flies in the air and dives into the sea. (mid shot)
______ swims into the ocean…not knowing that ______ is a Shark. (small scale)
(mid Shot) ______ chases ______..(THIS NEEDS TO BE WORKED ON)

______ sees a hand and there is a surfer on a surfboard (Played by ____). He takes her hand and she lifts him up onto the board. They surf the waves.
(small scale) we see them both stand on the surfboard. Then they arrive at the shore and sign, ‘Melbourne’- ______ and _____ create a city landscape that ______ walks through. ______ is having a coffee…and______ eats a burger…they wave to ______. INSERT CATCHING A FOOTBALL?? (______)

______ continues on and sees a tram (small scale)- ______ is the driver.
He gets off and waves to the tram driver. He continues on into the bush Trees (small scale) in the landscape...played by ______. A koala is up a tree (small scale. They turn to large scale and______ describes the features of a koala and eats a leaf. ______ waves and continues on. He walks through more trees and meets a kangaroo- Played by ______. He jumps on the back and bounces along...and falls off.

This is as far as we got this day. Next week I plan to continue this- as he lands from falling on the kangaroo- he comes face to face with a frilled neck lizard (played by ______) Then he walks further- the sun gets hot….he meets an Aborigine (______)- who gives him water and they shake hands….then I don't know how to end this..

Perhaps we keep this open??...arrgh...will need to think about this one. Any feedback would be ace!

GROUP TWO: The kids were all great today. They worked so hard and there was really good concentration from everyone, with lots of wriggle breaks!! We started the session by talking about how the show was in a few weeks and they all needed to work together and have fun. The kids agreed.
So, we went through the idea of the design of the entire show. Forming single file, the kids walked with us to the front of the school as we described the tunnel, the aquarium, the puppet show, the rooms and the videos...they
loved the idea. They suggested ideas for the aquarium. This was great – as they got up and did it one by one in front of each other.

Meanwhile – Leonie and Gavin set up a large piece of paper and set up the overhead projector. Sue led this session and formed small groups to try out the idea of their live performance. First, they practiced creeping up slowly, so their shadows appeared as large blurry images turning into clearly defined sharp outlines of them. Looks so cute- seeing the shadows of a mass of children! Then they played with their hands, some spelt their names too which I thought looked so great. Then they write their names with texta and you can see the writing start to appear on the paper...then they practiced tapping the paper, then little by little...they start to tear little holes... this was great. Some eyes appear, then their faces, then they get more wild and tear the whole thing down. They will need to practice this again to get the subtleties, pace and a sense of doing it as an ensemble- though it was great considering it was the first time they tried it! As Sue said, it's important to do what feels natural and easy for the kids to do...and this is certainly the aim.

Afterwards, as a group, we discussed what should happen next with all the shreds of paper. Again, one by one, they got up and gave a suggestion. They were quite good about it... Many were saying ‘I haven’t had a go yet’ and we kept reinforcing to ‘wait and be patient, everyone will have a say’... ahhhh democracy...

SWANS: By this time, Sue and I were delirious ha. But we kept going, with Michelle there. We brought out some of the cardboard boxes, the overhead projector and paper balls. We continued to tape balls to ______ chair. He really likes this. We will do this for the show.

______ is so responsive and warm with us now. He got the masking tape and unraveled it all the way down the corridor- we want to use this idea in the tunnel so we will rehearse this with him so that he is familiar with it. It is a ritual for him and one we all love. We thought that ______ could hold the other end of the tape for the show. We will rehearse this with them.

______ played quite well with Jodee. He played with her on a step ladder that she lay down on the ground. He also played a bit with the cardboard box again. He signed to her “Please” after Jodee had asked him to say please. This was a first for him to sign with her.

______ was great. She loved the cardboard boxes. She played with ____ a lot – peering through the holes and playing peekaboo...she is such a sweet girl. I think she will like working with cardboard boxes a lot. We need to develop a role for her in the show.

We have been thinking about how to work with these guys as performers – and Sue and I thought that the four of them could be in cardboard boxes- and that they are also behind the shadow screen too with the rest of the younger kids...or that the doors open and they are there too?? We will need to rehearse this with them and develop this as a ritual for them...that which is familiar to them and to gauge what they like/don’t like.
Adding to the list of ideas to develop in the future...

18th August 2009

- Doing a shadow dance – Anna to do some movement/dance choreography for the first group
- Doing a shadow dance with streamers for the second group – Medina and Anna to help the kids make streamers (or maybe Mark and Leonie can support the kids with this?) and ask the kids to do a solo dance with streamers – can just be 30sec-1min each
- Bring balloons for the third group so they can feel the vibrations from the drums
- I (Medina) think we should have show and tell time - since that girl (______) came with a beautiful visual story I want to ask each child to tell us a story – the boy with dog /role shifts/ the boy who went to Turkey. They have their own stories to tell – let them share with us... food for thought – this is where English is restricted and Auslan is used freely – they all come from different backgrounds and it’s interesting
- Can we also ask Mel to organise newspapers/ party streamers/ sticky tape / charcoal/ paper for the 1st September???

From 11th August

- Paper dresses with shadow puppets underneath
- Paper sculptures with torch light
- A ceiling or wall of torch lights circling around
- The audience to peer through ripped paper screens and see parts of a show or someone’s limbs
- All kids to develop their own shadow puppet play
- The kids to continue drawing large landscapes
- Kids to paint their houses

From 4th August

- (email from Jai-) content ideas- a land where everyone signs- a character in a wheelchair, getting lost in the forest, a deaf girl...
- From Jodee- (long term) commissioning a company to create a signing avatar – signing cartoons... signing puppets.
- Boxes to have windows and doors where shadow puppetry happens.
- Jurassic/ dinosaurs landscape
- Using cellophane as states of atmosphere
- Breaking through the paper of the shadow puppets
- Kids to take photos of the process and document
- Develop storytelling skills through emotional levels
- Continue working on emotional levels
- Developing critical analysis skills and giving constructive criticism

From 28th July

- An emotion wall where the kids stick their heads through and all perform the same expression- ie: anger, happy, sad... could be beautiful visually and very funny
- The emotional drawing looked like hieroglyphics – could this be something to project- or use an overhead projector
- Bringing in torches or workers lamps to convey where the performance space is. Using the boxes to create different stage configurations- (in the round, parade style, catwalk style, traditional, promenade, outdoor)
- Having a visual diary show and tell session
- Developing mime skills and working with props in stylised way
- Object manipulation
- Sensory theatre- ie: blindfolds, taste, smell and touch.. guiding one another and trust.
- Continue developing the boxes and see what ideas emerge-
- Setting up the boxes as a city street and the kids perform within it.
- Bringing in more boxes of different shapes and sizes
- Introducing environment and landscape- construction, installation, painting, making, breaking and repairing as concepts of the process of making...
- Working in smaller groups may be easier and more focused.

From 21st July

- Mask work
- Face painting
- Shadow play
- Making plays with the hands only
- Putting your arms through someone where they do the facial expression and you sign
- Giving the kids a blank canvas to draw on- let them guide us
- Developing spaces like tunnels, slides, peeking holes, cubby houses, rolling and climbing
- Newspaper and tape
- Waiting for self portraits from Cambodia- tell them about it
- Video diaries to work on with Trudy – soon???
- Paper balls
- Capes and super heroes
- Deaf relay interpreters and developing that as a convention for the kids to lead everything
From 14th July

- **SUE**: An unseen scene under the table – shadows, voices, grunts, quivers – no one knows what is going on but everyone wants to peek
- Long lines of sticky added and added to – like washing lines for random shapes – or perhaps people hung up to dry, or a little moving landscape.
- A pile of paper to scrunch and screw and moosh and throw – in one space all by itself – like a small room - full of paper for scrunching and balling and tossing in the air.
- Big wall of drawing, to add to and scrawl on, abstract.
- A line of paper on the walls of a very large room where everyone stands and draws a continuing landscape of their lives - families, names, houses, pets, cars roads, etc – add to over a day or a week.
- Scenes you can see through a hole in a wall – the robbers scene , the brides, the man who eats everything, - maybe a big box with the scenes inside with audience looking through holes all around the space...
- Scale/style shifts – people, to paper people,
- I reckon next week I’d love to bring in some big boxes – the idea of creating a personal space – maybe covering inside with paper and then using sculptural paper work and drawing to decorate the inside. I happen to have 38 big boxes in my shed... what do you think? Could be a nice physical catalyst too . Medina is coming in next week as well so maybe it’s a chance to start the VV?
- **JODEE**: I think the kids respond really well to costume making and props…the more visual the better…and the more we explore how we use everyday objects to become magical objects the better...maybe even drawing on costumes....and using lots of TAPE!
- A tunnel that you crawl through- or lie back and look up. I like the idea of the box Sue is talking about ...
- Developing the kids sense of understanding of what storytelling is...in sign language and drama and looking at what the conventions are...so deconstructing and playing with well known fairy tales as a starting point is a simple and structured approach for them to explore.
- Really looking at scale – what their hands can do as puppets too...drawing on their hands and doing visual vernacular to emphasise the scale of things...