

Muckheap in

Auslan An

evaluation of
Polyglot Theatre's
workshop and
performance

program **2011-2012**



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Published by Polyglot Theatre, Melbourne, 2012.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have had 'Auslan interpreted' theatre performance before at the school and a rare one has worked ok but usually the deaf children have to work very, very hard to make sense of the performance. "Working very, very hard" is not the joy and fun of the performing arts. Deaf children have to work very, very hard a lot, making sense of the world they can't hear. Hearing children get to chill out and laugh and relax in an arts-based program or performance. This bilingual performance allowed the deaf children equal access to a quality experience. Teacher at a Deaf school

This evaluation report provides details of Polyglot Theatre's *Muckheap* in Auslan. *Muckheap* is a popular Polyglot production, now in its eleventh year. As part of the ten year anniversary of this show, it was adapted into Australian sign language, Auslan, whilst still retaining the English language component. This was not a simple matter of translation, however, as Auslan is a textual, visual language that whilst employing the English alphabet, functions in different ways to a spoken language:

Deaf people in Deaf communities use signed languages which (a) are not identical to the majority spoken language of the majority hearing community, and (b) are not identical to the signed languages of other Deaf communities. Auslan is the name given to the natural sign language (or native sign language) of the Australian Deaf community. Signed languages, including Auslan, fulfil all the criteria of a natural language. (<http://www.auslanshop.com.au/webcontent5.htm>)

The process of adapting *Muckheap* into Auslan began with a week long workshop with Furlong Park School for the Deaf in Melbourne, and was further developed in rehearsal with director Sue Giles, and two bilingual artists. The production toured to a selection of schools for deaf children throughout Victoria, and as part of the Gaslight Festival in Maldon. There was also a general public showing at Polyglot Theatre.

This evaluation is commissioned by Polyglot Theatre. Data for this evaluation was collected through observation, surveys and interviews with the key participating groups – teachers, parents, children and artists. The evaluation is designed to explore five project aims in regards to the child participants of the workshops and performances, and the broader implications of Polyglot Theatre's commitment to producing work for the *Deaf* community. These project aims are:

1. To achieve an equity of experience for both deaf and hearing audience members
2. To provide access to an artistically satisfying and engaging theatre experience for deaf children
3. To raise the profile of theatre in schools for deaf children, and the entitlement that deaf children have to quality theatre experiences more generally

4. To raise awareness of the Deaf community amongst the hearing population
5. To use the performance as a relationship building tool between the existing partners of the current project, but also in leveraging future support for the creation of theatre for the Deaf community more broadly.

DRAW SOMETHING YOU REMEMBER FROM MUCKHEAP



The findings of this evaluation are as follows:

1. **Did Polyglot's *Muckheap* in Auslan achieve equity of experience for both deaf and hearing audience members?**
 - Polyglot achieved a truly bilingual performance that provided equity of experience for audience members. This was achieved by taking an immersive approach to employing Auslan as a natural and whole language of its own, rather than by simply translating the English language within the performance.
 - The production was most successful when there were both hearing and deaf audience members. This is because the interaction between the two cultures as audience members contextualised the experience for both. Without either group the impetus for a bilingual production is lost.
 - The value of a bilingual performance is two-fold. Not only does it encourage inclusivity and equity of experience for both deaf and hearing audience members, it reflects the bicultural experience of many deaf children. Deaf children are often bilingual themselves, and engage in the world through sign and spoken language.
 - The broad vision of Polyglot Theatre, a vision that is driven by thematic explorations of the place of children in society, and aims to stimulate

conversation between children and adults, was retained and achieved even within the other driving forces of this production. As one of the adults in the audience commented, 'You can almost think as a child when you're in that performance'.

2. Did the performance provide access to an artistically satisfying and engaging theatre experience for deaf children?

- The performance provided deaf children with access to an artistically satisfying and engaging theatre experience. This was because the production met Polyglot's usual high standards of artistic excellence and quality, employing professional artists. Time was taken to ensure that the adaptation of this classic Polyglot text was culturally sensitive and accurately portrayed in Auslan. Deaf children were able to witness a holistic theatre experience rather than divide their attention between off-stage translator and on-stage action.
- Attaching the performance to a workshop process, either before or after the performance had been seen, deepened the children's engagement with the production, and maximised their artistic confidence when making their own puppets. This approach ensured that the overall experience was integrated and satisfying.
- Whilst *Muckheap* engaged children, deaf adults also had a profound response to the performance. This was particularly evident at the Gaslight Festival. Many of the deaf adults, some in their seventies, had never seen a bilingual theatre piece. This demonstrates the uniqueness and absolute need for an ongoing commitment to this kind of theatre.

3. Did *Muckheap* raise the profile of theatre in schools for deaf children, and the entitlement that deaf children have to quality theatre experiences more generally?

- Theatre presented in Auslan and English, especially of a popular performance such as *Muckheap*, a show that has played to thousands of children worldwide, includes deaf children into a shared cultural experience and contributes to incorporating the Deaf community into the mainstream.
- Undoubtedly, the tour to schools (especially those that had not previously worked with Polyglot Theatre) has now created a positive and trusted relationship, with all schools reporting that they would both work with Polyglot again and recommend the company to others. If Polyglot continues to make bilingual theatre, this will contribute to increasing the profile and accessibility of theatre in schools for deaf children, but also raise the awareness of Polyglot Theatre amongst the deaf community more generally.
- Producing shows such as *Muckheap* in Auslan goes some way to normalising the idea that mainstream productions should be adapted (not just translated) for the Deaf community. Rather than responding to

this commitment as something exceptional, the adaptation of an existing show is perhaps an even more profound act than creating a new bilingual show from scratch. This adaptation states clearly that deaf children are as entitled as all other children to access to popular, widely toured and well-known children's theatre. It has a history and a record that can be attested to and investigated by parents and schools thinking of bringing their deaf children along.

4. Did the production raise awareness of the Deaf community amongst the hearing population?

- The limited opportunities for both the deaf and hearing communities to see bilingual theatre means that at this time the possibility of raising awareness of the Deaf community through theatre to the hearing population is extremely narrow. The importance of the investment made by Polyglot to provide access to bilingual theatre, then, cannot be overestimated.
- Whilst the impact of one production may be limited in terms of the numbers of the hearing community that can be reached, Polyglot's commitment to awareness-raising of the Deaf community is a step of real action in the right direction. However, Polyglot Theatre is constrained to operate within the current policy and funding environment and this limits the resources available to actively create, produce and promote bilingual theatre to a broad audience of both deaf and hearing people. An aim such as this cannot be achieved in isolation.

5. Did the performance function as a relationship building tool between the existing partners of the current project, but also in laying groundwork for leveraging future support for the creation of theatre for the Deaf community more broadly?

- It is my observation that over the last several years, part of the learning curve of working with targeted communities for Polyglot has been in how to meet the unique demands placed on the performers. This is particularly true of touring shows. The genuine desire Polyglot has to provide for their artists is often challenged by the lack of funding and resources available. As essential partners in the creative process, however that more can still be done to support Polyglot artists working with targeted communities with diverse needs.
- It is not within the scope of this evaluation to measure the impact that this production has had on Polyglot's partnerships with the funding bodies involved of this production, nor whether future funding will be leveraged as a result of it. However, Polyglot's ongoing commitment to evaluating their own goals and aims provides an evidence base for their work that can be passed onto partners and funding bodies, with the hope of leveraging further funding dollars in this area to support their aim of access to quality theatre experiences for all children.

OUTLINE

1. The Deaf community in Australia

The Australian Deaf Community is a network of people who share a language and culture and a history of common experiences. It is similar to an ethnic community. Members socialise, play sport and sometimes worship together and join together in political lobby groups. Deaf Australia

The most important element of Polyglot Theatre's bilingual *Muckheap* is Polyglot's relationship to the Australian Deaf community. Whilst both hearing and signing audiences are being catered for in this production, Polyglot is already well versed in delivering exciting and engaging theatre to hearing children. The Deaf culture, like any other specific community, has particular cultural imperatives that need to be understood in order to successfully contribute to this community. The primary cultural indicator of this community is the language it employs – Auslan. As the Deaf Australia website states:

The single most unifying factor of the Deaf community is the use of Auslan (Australian Sign Language). The physical fact of deafness does not automatically mean membership of the Deaf community: not all people who are deaf use Auslan. It also does not matter how deaf a person is. A common assumption is that only severely or profoundly deaf people use Auslan but this is not in fact true - many deaf members of the Deaf community are only

moderately deaf. Some members of the Deaf community are hearing people, in particular people who grew up in the Deaf community because their parents are Deaf. A hearing person who is an accepted member of the Deaf community will, without exception, use Auslan.

Most deaf people are necessarily bicultural, because of familial relationships or because of the need to be part of daily life engaged in tasks such as going to the bank, working and shopping.

The Deaf Australia website states that, 'There are no definitive statistics for how many people belong to the Deaf community. Recent estimates have ranged from Hyde and Power (1991) who calculated that there were 15,400 Deaf users of sign language, and possibly another 15,000 hearing users'.

2. Background to the production

Muckheap is one of Polyglot Theatre's most successful and enduring productions. It has toured nationally and around the world to thousands of children. The play is described by Polyglot in the following way:

Funny, physical and fantastically messy, Muckheap is a tale of two people trying to clean out their house for their big move. In the process of packing and sorting they find all their hoarded junk too interesting, useful or too full of memories to throw away. As a way of coping, the characters throw themselves into a story, made up on the spot and illustrated with whatever comes to hand. What emerges is the story of Jacky and the Beanstalk... with a twist that parallels their own situation. From

throwing out junk to creating characters with consummate ease, this show displays the awesome power of the puppeteer. It invites children to become their own story makers and encourages imaginative play through whatever you have at hand.

In 2004, Polyglot was approached by Deaf Children Australia with the idea of interpreting *Muckheap* for deaf audiences. Polyglot determined to go one step further and instead to integrate interpreters into the performance. A rehearsed performance was developed. This approach felt artistically unsatisfying, however, in that English language was still privileged and the deaf audience remained secondary to the hearing audience.

Instead, a further creative development of another show (that did not reach production) toured to schools in Victoria. This development was a steep learning curve for Polyglot. 'It wasn't a simple project and I don't think we engaged with it in the right way. We didn't have enough deaf people in the room. We were relying on interpreters rather than deaf people. We didn't contact the culture very deeply. There was all kinds of ignorant, first timer, non-researched approaches to it', states Sue Giles, artistic director of Polyglot Theatre.

It was not until 2011, and the 10 year anniversary of *Muckheap*, that the idea was pursued again. After translating *Muckheap* into Chinese, and seeing how the culture and community impacted so much on the show, artistic director, Sue Giles, decided to return her focus to the Deaf community. As Sue states she

was interested in seeing, 'how the Deaf community and culture affect the relevance and the shape and the dynamic of this play'. Sue believed that the use of puppetry and visual communication in the play meant that it leant itself well to translation into Auslan.

3. Participating Groups

Child participants and audience Many of the child audience had not only the opportunity to see the performance at their school but also to participate in a junk puppet making workshop with the performers.

Adult audience Beyond simply bringing their children along to the performance, for some of the deaf adult audience seeing *Muckheap* was the first time in their lives they had had the opportunity to see a play in 'language'.

Teachers Teachers at the participating primary schools participated in or viewed the workshops as well as attending the productions. Participation by teachers was mostly hands-on.

Furlong Park School for Deaf Children The school was purpose built to deliver educational programs to deaf children including those with additional needs from the western and northern regions of metropolitan Melbourne and the rural fringe. The school provides educational programs for both pre-school children aged 3 to 5 years of age and primary school students aged 5 to 12 years of age. The communication approach using spoken and written English and Auslan

(Australian Sign Language) addresses individual student needs and is based on a bilingual/bicultural model.

Artists Sue Giles is artistic director of City of Riddles. Since Sue Giles was appointed Artistic Director of Polyglot in 2000, she has directed, written or devised fourteen works, which have toured nationally and internationally, including The Big Game (Melbourne International Arts Festival, Singapore Arts Festival), Check Out! (Melbourne International Comedy Festival, National Theatre of Korea, Hong Kong International Arts Carnival, winner Excellent Production Award at Shanghai International Children's Theatre Festival) Headhunter (UNIMA international puppetry festival, ASSITEJ international festival for young people, Drama Victoria Award winner), *Muckheap* (Esplanade Theatres Singapore, Segerstrom Center for the Arts, USA and translated into Mandarin-Chinese as La Ji Da Bian Shen and playing at the National Center for the Performing Arts, China) Baggy Pants, Tangle, City of Riddles, Sticky Maze, Paper Planet and the community spectacular High Rise.

Jodee Mundy is an award winning performer, director and facilitator. Her performance work has spanned from physical theatre, visual theatre, community arts to circus and puppetry. Recent performance highlights include, 'Everybody' (Westside Professional Circus Touring Show), 'In the Dark', (Art of Difference), 'Potion', (Melbourne Food and Wine Festival) and 'Deceased Estate' (Melbourne Fringe 2008) with Sensory Theatre company, Round Angle, 'Pigeonhole'

(TAP residency with Polyglot Puppet Theatre), 'Happy 1000' (mainteater; toured Indonesia, London International Festival of Theatre), 'A Forest' (Pacitti Company, London) and 'Contagion' (Weld, Stockholm). She has appeared in Holby City (BBC 4), See Hear (BBC 2) and on Vee Tv (Channel 4). Her directing highlights include: A Parade- for The Village (Falls Festival), 'The Wind in bminor' (HotHouse, La Mama), movement director of 'Dysfunction' (Soho Theatre, London, UK national tour), "assistant director for the Snuff Puppets (Thames Night Parade, London) and her largest site specific work, 'Five Years of Happiness' (Brighton Fringe Festival, UK). In community arts, she works at Arts Access Victoria part time for the Deaf Arts Network as a Support Officer/ Auslan Interpreter and was one of the co- founders of this project. She trained at the Ecole De Mime Corporeal Dramatique in London (2002-2007), with the initial support from the Australia Council Skills and Development Grant and The Ian Potter Cultural Foundation. She is a qualified mime teacher. Prior to that, she trained in Animateuring at The Victorian College of the Arts in 1999.

David Pidd is into his fourth decade as a freelance performer and creator of theatre. A Graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, he works in theatres, theatre foyers, at festivals and major sporting events, in hotels, restaurants and vineyards, on the street, in schools, hospitals, prisons and National Parks. His extensive work with theatre for young people spans two generations. With TUK, Salamanca Theatre, Australian Theatre of the Deaf, MTC, Arena Theatre, Back To

Back, Patch Theatre, Polyglot and many freelance shows and tours, he has performed across Australia and overseas. He co-wrote and performed the award winning play *Parallax Island* with Maude Davey. He is a co-founder of Dramatic Edge and is Co-Director of The Jump, working with consultants to create and deliver conferences and training seminars using theatre and performance. His recent work includes the co-creation of *Dooda-a Surrealist Cabaret* for The Melbourne Comedy Festival and Adelaide Fringe, touring the UK performing in *We Built This City* for Polyglot, *6 Characters in Search of an Author*, Directed by Lawrence Strangio, at La Mama Theatre and at the Melbourne Recital Centre, *The Songs from the Changi, POW AIF Concert Party*, performed ANZAC Day 2012.

Polyglot Theatre is an internationally renowned creator of interactive and experiential theatre for children aged up to 12 years. Polyglot's theatre is inspired by the artwork, play and ideas of children and performances feature active participation from audience members through touch, play and encounter. Polyglot's artistic works respond to the childhood need for experiences that encourage free artistic expression and an imaginative interpretation of the world. Polyglot seeks to challenge, to foster curiosity and to inspire. The company specialise in puppet theatre, large scale interactive installation work and participatory workshop programs. For over 30 years, Polyglot has been recognised one of Australia's leading children's theatre companies, and in recent years the company has been in

demand internationally, playing to over 60 000 children annually on four continents.



Funding Bodies Auslan Muckheap is supported Arts Victoria, City of Melbourne, City of Stonnington, Australian Communities Foundation, the Jack Brockhoff Foundation, Besen Family Foundation and Ivor Ronald Evans Foundation, administered by Equity Trustees.

The way Auslan and English were used simultaneously, with no preference for one or the other. Truly bilingual! Well done! More mainstream Arts and Theatre producers need to see this show to see how it's done!

Adult audience member

PROJECT SUMMARY

Auslan is not just about translating words into sign. It is about tone, context, shape, body language – it's the whole body. The grammar and syntax is completely different. The jokes are completely different.
Sue Giles

According to Sue Giles, children's entertainment for deaf children is incredibly thin on the ground. Interpretation of English language shows, when they do happen, doesn't go far enough. As Sue states, 'Some things will be interpreted but they still have to switch their vision from one side of the stage to the other. Language and jokes don't translate literally. It is a completely different textual language'.

As such Polyglot Theatre, with their vision of inclusivity and access to theatre for all children, determined to adapt one of their canonical texts, *Muckheap*, to Auslan whilst retaining the English language component.

The process of adapting the show began in December 2011 with workshops with students at Furlong Park School for the Deaf. Polyglot Theatre had previously conducted a six month residency with this school in 2009 and forged a strong relationship. Whilst the initiative for the bilingual production came from Polyglot, the impetus behind it came from the partnership with Furlong Park.

The performance was developed with a week long workshop with three different age groups at the school.

Polyglot worked with students with puppetry and imagery as well as exploring notions of how story translates, with the use of visual storytelling. Ideas were tested with the students, 'We told them a story through visual vernacular, a deaf poetic form involving changes in scale, and then the students would draw the story they saw'. In this way, Polyglot artists could identify what was being lost in translation.

After a week with the students, artists David and Jodee, along with director Sue spent a week in rehearsals. In addition, several deaf consultants were brought into the rehearsal process including Steph Linder, a leading Australian deaf interpreter, who also attended the workshops at Furlong Park, and advised on signing and specifically how to make the puppets sign. In addition, deaf artist Asphyxia offered her critical appraisal. The Deaf Arts Network director also attended rehearsals. The understandings gained in the workshops, 'blew the entire structure of the play out of the water...We almost started again. And what the play has now become is about communication' according to Sue.

The performance was rehearsed for a further two weeks in February and March 2012 ahead of a Victoria wide schools tour, as well as several public performances, all of which took place in March 2012. The production was provided free of charge to schools and to the Gaslight Festival, a deaf-specific arts festival, in Maldon.

EVALUATION OUTLINE

The evaluation considers the following project aims:

1. To achieve an equity of experience for both deaf and hearing audience members
2. To provide access to an artistically satisfying and engaging theatre experience for deaf children
3. To raise the profile of theatre in schools for deaf children, and the entitlement that deaf children have to quality theatre experiences more generally
4. To raise awareness of the Deaf community amongst the hearing population
5. To use the performance as a relationship building tool between the existing partners of the current project, but also in leveraging future support for the creation of theatre for the Deaf community more broadly.

Whilst the first two aims can be tested directly within the scope of this evaluation, the final three aims are longitudinal in nature and only early indicators of these project aims can be provided.

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation is based on analysis of the following data sets:

- Observations of a rehearsal, a public performance and a school performance
- Survey data gathered by Polyglot Theatre at public and schools performances from both child and adult audience members
- Survey data gathered by Polyglot Theatre from teachers
- Interviews with performers and workshop facilitators, Jodee Mundy and David Pidd
- Interview with *Muckheap* and Polyglot Artistic Director, Sue Giles
- Interview with one family (2 deaf adults, one deaf child and one bilingual child) post-performance
- Focus group with one group of students (prep-yr 6) after viewing the performance at Furlong Park Primary School
- Interviews with 2 teachers from Furlong Park Primary School
- Drawings generated by child audience members at public and schools performances
- Analysis of video recording of Furlong Park Primary School workshop – November 2011 (development workshops for Auslan *Muckheap* performance).

ANALYSIS

1. Did *Polyglot's Muckheap in Auslan* achieve equity of experience for both deaf and hearing audience members?

Although we have no deaf children in our school, it was great for our students to realise that there are other ways to communicate that are peaceful and expressive.

Of the five organisations presenting *Muckheap* in Auslan (including four schools, as well as the Gaslight Festival) who completed the Polyglot survey all agreed that the performance achieved equity of experience for both deaf and hearing audience members.

100% of the adult general public audience, a combination of hearing and deaf audience members, indicated that they enjoyed the show. Predominantly, they witnessed their children exploring new ideas through watching the performance, as well as experiencing the emotions of others. The adults valued the bilingual nature of the show, its humour, its highly visual quality, as well as the simplicity of the set.

Children at the public performances generally enjoyed the show and reported feeling excited, creative and happy after seeing the production. Most of the children in attendance at the public shows were between 3 and

8 years old. Whilst the survey data does not include information about whether children were hearing or deaf, my observation is that there was a combination of both in attendance. The responses from both hearing and deaf children were similar, with the only difference being the reaction to Auslan. Deaf children were excited by the opportunity to see Auslan as an integrated part of the performance, and hearing children were fascinated by this new and unusual method of communication. The children's survey responses indicate a detailed recall of the story and a particular engagement with the physical elements such as the puppets and the physical humour. Whilst a few children found the giant and the yelling a bit too much, other comments indicate a lasting positive impact:

Last time I saw this I went home and made my own muckheap.

I learnt that you can do anything you want.

Adaptation

The work of adapting *Muckheap* was done both in workshops with deaf students at Furlong Park, and with the two hearing and signing performers over three weeks of rehearsals. According to performer David Pidd there was a lot of work involved in transforming *Muckheap* into a bilingual show. Jokes that would appeal to either the deaf or hearing audience, but not both, were edited out of the show in order to assist with an equitable experience for both. According to David:

The hard bit was making sure there were enough of both languages that the audience would truly get the show.

Horsham – the show that wobbled

A schools performance in Horsham was particularly challenging. The school had only one deaf student but booked *Muckheap* for the entire school of 450 to watch. Whilst this was a seemingly powerful affirmation of all that Polyglot hoped for this production, the reality was far from ideal.

The large number of students, by far the biggest audience on the tour, staged in an acoustically challenging gymnasium meant that trying to connect with the audience was frustratingly difficult. The single deaf student, a year 5, was positioned in close proximity to the stage. But whilst acoustics in a Deaf school would not have been a particular issue, amongst this large hearing audience it was problematic in the extreme.

David reported feeling like the show was ‘wobbly’ almost from the outset, but what this could be attributable to he is not entirely certain. The performance started half an hour late and as a result the year 5/6’s had to leave for another engagement before the show ended. Not only did this mean that a quarter of the audience left whilst the performance was still going, the only deaf student also had to leave.

Whilst these circumstances are near impossible for any performance, the ‘wobbliness’ of the show could also indicate that for a hearing audience without much connection to Auslan or

the Deaf community, the performance did not in fact work in its entirety.

However, an interview with a family composed of both hearing and deaf members offers a different perspective. This family saw the performance twice, once at Polyglot Theatre, and once at the Gaslight Festival – two very different environments. According to them the show ‘most definitely’ worked as a bilingual performance. The adult members of the family saw the children, one hearing and one deaf, respond positively to the production, and in the drawings they generated post-performance they both recalled the production in vivid detail. At one point one of the adults needed to translate something for the deaf child but as this child is only five years old this would not be an uncommon experience hearing or deaf audiences. Both children valued the humour, reported that they enjoyed it and laughed a lot.

In addition, native Auslan speaker and performer Jodee Mundy observed that CODA’s (children of deaf adults) had an enthusiastic response to the performance as it allowed their unique bilingual position to be artistically catered to.

My observation of the public performance at Polyglot Theatre was that whilst hearing audience members were in the majority, all of the audience were equally engaged and attentive to the performance. This was evidenced by the shared laughter from the audience as well as physical responsiveness, such as leaning forward or making faces, at similar points during the show.

2. Did the performance provide access to an artistically satisfying and engaging theatre experience for deaf children?

It's a big part of the deaf community to tell stories.

Jodee Mundy

Overwhelmingly, teachers, adult caregivers and child participants are in agreement that *Muckheap* in Auslan provided an exciting opportunity to fully engage with the theatrical event for deaf children. Of the five organisations surveyed presenting *Muckheap*, including four schools and the Gaslight Festival, there was consensus that the performance provided access to an artistically satisfying and engaging theatre experience for deaf children.

A teacher at one presenting school observed that:

The bilingual performance of Muckheap was very entertaining and professional. Most of the audience were Grade 6 students. Their engagement was evident by their continued laughter. They asked relevant questions and made observations that Jodee signed quicker than David, because she had grown up in a Deaf family. Another student commented on how good it was for our signing Deaf students to be catered for and how important it was for them to be fully involved.

Artistic satisfaction with the performance was evident in the vivid

detail with which the show was recalled by a group of Furlong Park students after the performance at their school. The children reported that they didn't get bored and laughed a lot. The giant was a popular element mentioned by several students and rendered in the drawings they did when asked to recall something from the performance. The students recalled key moments throughout the storyline.

The deaf children in the audience of *Muckheap* at Furlong Park demonstrated a high level of engagement with the performance. This was observable through both physical and vocal engagement, such as calling out in response to questions asked by the performers and in becoming focussed and still when following the story. It was not my expectation that the children would be so vocal in their response but many of the deaf children in attendance communicated in both English and Auslan, and wore hearing aids. There was a great deal of laughter suggesting that the humour of the original play had been successfully adapted to Auslan.

Children of all ages in the audience were confident to laugh loudly and comment both in sign and verbally when they appreciated a moment in the show. In fact, teachers spent much time trying to quiet the children, another element I was not anticipating when coming into the school. However, children were equally attentive and quiet during the more dramatic moments of the play and leaned in with their whole bodies as they engaged with the performance.

The performance was easy to follow, and the actors were able to sign. The show was very visual and humorous...The children locked their eyes to the performance, behaved really well through the whole show, they laughed. Teacher, Furlong Park

The students appeared to particularly enjoy the non-verbal physical moments of the show such as when Jodee comes at David, arms whirling, with newspaper and forces him out of the stage space. In addition, David's extended helicopter crashing moment was a cause for great laughter and delight. When the energy of the show accelerated the child responded by calling out, with laughter and in throwing their arms in the air and pointing at what was grabbing their attention.

Development workshops at Furlong Park – December 2011

The workshops conducted at Furlong Park in December 2011 were designed to contribute to the development of *Muckheap* in Auslan. The artists took ideas from the existing show and played them with students. They asked children to write a list for what would be kept in shed, for example. This became part of the show. 'In any parts of the show when there was lots of talking, we would see how the kids would do it without talking and then we would respond in Auslan', reports Polyglot artist, Jodee Mundy.

One of several benefits of workshops for the students is that they function to integrate the performance experience – going from observer to maker/creator. In regards to

workshops to develop show specifically, this encourages a sense of ownership over the experience and contributes to the student's sense of esteem and personal value. Jodee commented that, 'They were like little consultants. It was great'. As a native Auslan speaker, but as someone who can also hear, Jodee is acutely aware in that creating a performance such as this, 'There is usually always something you need a deaf person to see. That's why we had deaf consultants in the room'.

Time spent with students in workshops made the children confident and comfortable to engage with the show and the performers, and to interact as the show went on. As one teacher noted, 'Our students worked with the artists in 2011 as they adapted this work, I hadn't seen the results and was impressed. Students from 4 to 12 years of age, including those with additional needs were equally engaged'.

Junk Puppet Workshops

The continuum of experience, from workshop to performance, is a powerful tool in empowering deaf children to feel confident to actively participate in the arts. An experience of performer of Jodee Mundy on the recent Auslan *Muckheap* tour evidences this.

Jodee was an artist involved with Polyglot's six month residency at Furlong Park Primary School in 2009. On the current Auslan *Muckheap* tour, Jodee performed at a high school that many of the same students who did the 2009 workshop now attend. They immediately recognised her and

responded very positively to seeing her again. In the junk puppet workshops that followed the *Muckheap* performance, it was Jodee's observation that the students who had previously worked with Polyglot when they were in year 4, and now in year 7, were artistically confident and creatively enlivened during the workshop, in comparison to students who had not had the opportunity to work with the company before. As she states, 'Those kids who had been through the Polyglot process were like ducks to water'.

A teacher at Furlong Park also observed the confidence that came from previous association with Polyglot, 'the students were very engaged and they were very excited when they discovered that Polyglot was coming. Most of them participated in their project in 2009'. The teacher witnessed that her students were very involved and showed their willingness to be part of their project. Nearly all of them kept putting their hands up to ask questions.

Another teacher, new to the school in 2012, was amazed at seeing that 'the students were very engaged and on task... the whole school was actively involved, very impressive...'

With international teaching experience, this teacher believed that his workshop was extremely well run, 'with teacher workshop stations with all the necessary equipment, glue guns, wire, tape etc'. He was impressed with the attentiveness of the students as instructions were given and the 'junk

but treasure through children's eyes' was spread out in front of them.



Using drawing to measure satisfaction and engagement

After one public performance and one schools performance, deaf children who had seen the show were asked to draw something they remembered about it. Drawing as a way of interviewing child participants was used in this evaluation for two reasons. The first reason is that this approach aided non-verbal communication between the evaluator, a non-Auslan speaker, and the children. Secondly, this approach attempts to overcome problems that often arise when interviewing children including inadvertently asking leading questions or prompting children's responses. Children up to the age of ten are usually un-self conscious about their artistic ability and will happily draw if asked. As this is an active and creative interview technique children generally respond positively to the request.

The drawings in this case indicated a detailed recall of the events of the play, in particular the giant and the beanstalk, images that reoccurred throughout many children's images.

This suggests that incorporating a classic children's fairy tale into the play worked strongly for the children. Its familiarity encouraged engagement with the story more generally. The performers were central to most images, as was the shed, although most children rendered this building as a house rather than a shed. The little girl puppet and her pigtailed appeared in several drawings as did the envelope 'puppet'. The key elements of the play – set, puppets and performers – appear to carry equal weight for the children watching.

All of the children were quick to take up the offer of doing a drawing and most did multiple drawings in the time we had together. Colours were bold and bright, reflecting the set, and their positive experience of it.

Together, all of this indicates a high level of engagement with the production and a strong sense of understanding, focus and connection to the story.

Gaslight Festival

Despite Gaslight being a festival for the Deaf community, performer Jodee Mundy believes that the power of the performance at this event was that it was in 'language and English and wasn't just mime'. In her opinion the Deaf community responded really well and in fact a second performance was scheduled at the last minute due to the demand. As Jodee states:

We did a second a show because we knew it would be such a hit. We had deaf adults saying 'I have never seen a children's show before that I could

understand'. Some of these people were in their seventies. Really powerful.

Gaslight was like coming home. The community just loved it and the fact that it was given for free to the community when they're already so under-resourced trying to put on a festival. They put on Gaslight because most music festivals and arts festivals are inaccessible. The community do it. They're still ghettoised. We were the only show there. A professional show with sets and puppets. The deaf adults were drawn...they couldn't believe it. Just to see that. They hadn't seen anything since the Australian Theatre of the Deaf. Jodee Mundy



3. Did Muckheap raise the profile of theatre in schools for deaf children, and the entitlement that deaf children have to quality theatre experiences more generally?

People assume deaf children can sign because they're deaf. But deaf children need language role models and rich examples of their language just as hearing children do. In the Muckheap performance, deaf children could see their language being used in amazing ways, in ways that let them explore and stretch what they think their language can do. It was fantastic Auslan. Teacher at a deaf school

Of the five organisations presenting *Muckheap*, including four schools and the Gaslight Festival, all agreed that the play raised awareness of deaf children's entitlement to quality theatre experiences, and four agreed that it was able to raise the profile of theatre in schools for deaf children.

Most deaf children, according to Jodee Mundy, only use Auslan at school. As it is not part of much TV viewing in Australia, and many hearing parents of deaf children don't learn Auslan, deaf children can be socially isolated. Theatre presented in Auslan and English, especially of a popular performance such as *Muckheap* that has played to thousands of children worldwide includes these deaf

children into a shared cultural experience and contributes to incorporating the Deaf community into the mainstream.

Artist Jodee Mundy believes that, 'Polyglot is leading in Australia in terms of working with the Deaf community as a mainstream company. They are a beacon. And the company name is now known in the Deaf community...' As a vocal member of the Victorian Deaf community and founder of Deaf Arts Network, Jodee is well positioned to make this observation.

There were, however, challenges associated with bringing *Muckheap* to Deaf schools in Victoria. Despite the fact that the performance was offered free to Deaf schools, the take up was quite limited. The reason for this, from my observation, is two-fold. One relates to the issues generally associated with touring to any school including lack of human resources, cramped timetables and the demands of the curriculum. Jodee Mundy believes this is the same for Deaf schools but that the issue is complicated when attempting to build connection to the Deaf community:

'I think a lot of [Deaf] schools are under-resourced and the thought of having to organise the tour might have been hard. If someone from the community had called...'

Jodee suggests that if she had made contact, as a well known member of the Deaf community, there might have been a better response from the schools. 'I should have just told Sue names of people who work in schools'. Similarly, Polyglot staff couldn't get a

response from Deaf Children Australia, but when Jodee followed up there was an immediate response. Whilst Jodee was occupied with the performance, she believes that 'If you had someone in the community helping with the marketing that may have worked' to improve the uptake by schools.

Further to this, promotion of the show to the Deaf community by Polyglot did not necessarily happen in culturally appropriate ways. Most of the promotional material was in written form, whereas the deaf community tend to use video rather than printed materials when working in this way. Jodee Mundy states that, 'A video in Auslan would have worked. That link would have been sent to heaps and heaps of deaf people because we do a lot of marketing with Auslan on video instead of a flyer. There are other ways of marketing that will culturally reach out', something that, if the budget had permitted, could have been coordinated by Deaf Arts Network in Victoria.

Undoubtedly, the tour to schools (especially those that had not previously worked with Polyglot Theatre) has now created a positive and trusted relationship, with all schools reporting that they would both work with Polyglot again and recommend the company to others. Furlong Park is an example of a strengthening relationship based on ongoing connection between the company and the school. When Polyglot wanted to develop *Muckheap* in Auslan, they were able to propose a workshop program to Furlong Park that was readily accepted based on prior experience of the success of this partnership.

Building a relationship with any targeted community takes time, but Polyglot has begun to make good inroads with the deaf community. If Polyglot continues to make bilingual theatre, this will contribute to increasing the profile and accessibility of theatre in schools for deaf children, but also raise the awareness of Polyglot Theatre amongst the deaf community more generally.

That's what I love about Polyglot Theatre. They really think about those kids who miss out and empower them. Jodee Mundy

Entitlement

Two adults belonging to the Deaf community, Shane and Melissa, interviewed after the public showing at Polyglot Theatre spoke about the importance of deaf children having access to theatre in Auslan. From Shane's own experience seeing theatre as a child was vital but he missed out on a lot because not much was interpreted. He believes that Auslan theatre is a unique kind of theatre:

Whenever there is a show that is using Auslan I love it because it is so expressive. There's a lot of movement, facial expressions, humour.

Shane's partner, Melissa, a teacher at Furlong Park, believes that it is important for deaf children to learn about the world through theatre, and 'to have an understanding of what happens out there in the community. Like in this performance they spoke a little bit about compost and the

reminder that plastic doesn't go there... and recycling'.

Teachers and parents of deaf children both agree that these children need language role models and the opportunity to learn through story.

Theatre is a profound, exciting and engaging way to achieve these things, and access to theatre for children is taken for granted in the hearing community. Shane and Melissa both agree that exposure to Auslan theatre should 'start with the young kids, including touring to hearing schools', something that the now unfunded and non-touring Theatre of the Deaf did for many years in Australia.

Finally, producing shows such as *Muckheap* in Auslan goes some way to normalising the idea that mainstream productions should be adapted (not just translated) for the Deaf community. Rather than responding to this commitment as something exceptional, the adaptation of an existing show is perhaps an even more profound act than creating a new bilingual show from scratch. This adaptation states clearly that deaf children are as entitled as all other children to access to popular, widely toured and well-known children's theatre. It has a history and a record that can be attested to and investigated by parents and schools thinking of bringing their deaf children along.



4. Did the production raise awareness of the Deaf community amongst the hearing population?

The deaf community is a powerless minority...We don't meet our minority communities halfway. We wait for them to come to us...We're trying to redress that balance. Sue Giles

Of the five organisations presenting *Muckheap*, including four schools and the Gaslight Festival, four agreed that the performance raised awareness of the Deaf community amongst the hearing population. Within the limits of the survey data, however, it was not indicated how they thought this was achieved. I was able to observe this in a limited way at the public showing at Polyglot Theatre. Of the hearing families I spoke with before the performance, all indicated that they had had discussions with their children about Auslan and deafness.

Generally, the limited opportunities for both the deaf and hearing communities to see bilingual theatre, means that at this time the possibility of raising awareness of the Deaf community through theatre to the hearing population is extremely narrow. The importance of the investment made by Polyglot to provide access to bilingual theatre, then, cannot be overestimated.

According to a teacher, new to Furlong Park and with a history of having lived and worked all over the world, *Muckheap* was as good as anything he had seen:

I have always loved deaf theatre shows especially in London and international festivals. Muckheap was well polished; very visual... a high energy crafted show, weaving in Auslan with spoken language making it accessible to all ages, children and adults alike.

This teacher also commented that during his time in England he was spoilt for choice in regards to bilingual or sign language theatre, and his students would see around three productions performed in this way per year. His experience in Australia and New Zealand is that these opportunities are very rare.

There are multiple reasons for this, and certainly most of them are beyond the scope of what one theatre company is able to achieve independently. But in presenting a bilingual production, and in being funded to do so, Polyglot is making inroads to a much neglected arena.

It is worthwhile to consider what some of the impediments to presenting Auslan theatre in Victoria are. According to Polyglot artist, Jodee Mundy, much of the problem begins with lack of governmental funding in regards to access. In the UK, arts funding applications include a separate budget for access. This means that funding can be applied for towards the artistic product, and a separate source of funding can be

applied for to make the project accessible to targeted communities. The arts budget is not lost in attempting to make the product available more broadly. In Australia this does not happen.

One the greatest costs in creating specifically bilingual theatre, and deaf theatre with mainstream companies (a way to ensure access to a wide range of cultural products for the Deaf community and to resist further ghettoisation of this community) is access to interpreters. Interpreters would permit deaf actors, directors and theatre makers to be included in bilingual productions (something that did not happen with *Muckheap*).

In the case of *Muckheap* specifically, this would have meant that Sue Giles could have had an assistant director who was deaf (an aim of the project that was not able to be realised). Working without this was difficult. Jodee states, 'I loved working with Sue but it was challenging working with a director who didn't know Auslan, and not even having an assistant who could sign'.

Not only would this have taken the pressure off native Auslan speaker Jodee to be 'Deaf consultant' in the rehearsal room, it would have ensured that the creation of a show for the Deaf community was being created by members of the Deaf community.

Whose language are we really playing with? It's the language of the deaf community. It's like putting on a play in French and not having someone French in the room. Even though I'm a native signer, I'm not deaf. Jodee Mundy

Further to this, professional development of deaf artists within a mainstream company can help raise the standard and profile of deaf artists, ensuring an ongoing development of the deaf arts community in Australia. This opportunity was not able to be realised within the tight budget available to undertake the production, an issue Jodee believes that is not attributable to Polyglot Theatre but to the broader issues of funding for access and disability at a government level.

Jodee argues that a general change in government policy regarding disability in Australia is required. She cites the example that even in Gaddafi's Libya deaf citizens had access to the television news in sign language, something that is still not and never has been available in Australia.

According to Furlong Park teacher, Melissa Bryson, 'it is really important that [hearing audiences] have exposure to two languages – sign language and spoken English' as a way of raising the profile of the Deaf community in Australia.

But another deaf adult I spoke with believes that bilingual theatre can only go so far: 'It doesn't give you that cultural understanding. It tells you a story but there is no information about Deaf culture. I don't think there is a huge impact there. Will it really impact on the hearing audience?'

Whilst the impact of one production may be limited in terms of the numbers of the hearing community that can be reached, Polyglot's commitment to awareness-raising of

the Deaf community is a step of real action in the right direction. However, Polyglot Theatre must operate within the current policy and funding environment and this limits the resources available to actively create, produce and promote bilingual theatre to a broad audience of both deaf and hearing people. An aim such as this cannot be achieved in isolation.

Polyglot Theatre have with this show made inroads to sustained connection and partnerships with the Deaf community, and as these relationships develop the opportunity to showcase Polyglot's work more widely will only grow. This will necessarily take time and commitment. A strategic plan for building partnerships with the Deaf community and in raising awareness of the Deaf community to the mainstream would aid greatly in this effort.

Showcasing case studies of existing partnerships such as the one between Polyglot Theatre and Furlong Park have been proven to be powerful ways to communicate the value and effectiveness of projects to funding bodies. Longitudinal data is already beginning to emerge in regards to Polyglot's ongoing work with Furlong Park and capitalising on this through further research is another tool that can be employed to measure the impact of Polyglot's work with the Deaf community.



5. Did the performance function as a relationship building tool between the existing partners of the current project, but also in laying groundwork for leveraging future support for the creation of theatre for the Deaf community more broadly?

Of the five organisations presenting *Muckheap*, including four schools and the Gaslight Festival, all agreed that the production contributed to building relationships and laying groundwork for leveraging future support for the creation of theatre for the Deaf community.

The inclusion of cast member, Jodee Mundy, is an essential part of supporting this project goal. A lifelong advocate of theatre for the Deaf community, Jodee founded Deaf Arts Network at age 21 and is intimately connected to the Deaf theatre community in Australia. It is her belief that there is a current zeitgeist to rebuild the currently non-operational Theatre for the Deaf in Australia. Including Jodee in this production not only brought her unique artistic skill set to the production, but also an entrée to the Deaf community and the Deaf arts community more specifically. As has been demonstrated throughout this report, specialised knowledge is essential when working with a targeted community and Jodee's profound commitment to providing

quality arts experiences to the deaf, combined with her first hand understanding of this community has informed both the production and ongoing relationship building.

Perhaps most importantly, it allowed the Deaf community to identify 'one of their own' as part of this production and to embrace it.

The response of the teachers and schools involved with this tour indicates that relationships with these partners have been forged and strengthened in some cases. All of the schools would work with Polyglot again in the future. Raising awareness of Polyglot to the Deaf community is extremely important if a partnership of mutual advocacy is to occur. Existing shows such as *Tangle* and *We Built this City* are already by their nature tactile and largely non-verbal nature and as such ideal for a deaf audience. As previous evaluations of these shows state, the performances provide *all* children with interactive, immersive theatre experiences that are cutting edge in Australia. It may be as simple as learning how to market to Deaf community to take a huge step towards providing more deaf children with access to rich theatre experiences. This would also function to include members of the Deaf community into mainstream theatre experiences, via a product that already has a great appeal to many different communities throughout the world.

Relationship with artists

It is my observation that over the last several years, part of the learning curve of working with targeted communities for Polyglot has been in how to meet the unique demands

placed on the performers. This is particularly true of touring shows. The genuine desire Polyglot has to provide for their artists is often challenged by the lack of funding and resources available. As essential partners in the process, however, it is my observation that more can still be done to support Polyglot artists working with targeted communities with diverse needs.

One of the simplest approaches to better support artists relates to scheduling. As Jodee observes, the demands of this tour were unique to meeting the needs of a deaf audience:

...When you perform in two languages its tiring because you're switching all the time. Then you've got the puppetry. We'd get in at 8.00 in the morning, build the set... having question time, me interpreting for David...then literally having to pack down the set, set up a workshop...and then work out what is the best strategy to work with the kids because they've all got different needs. Some are fluent, some speak, some don't sign at all and to do that without a proper break.

As a touring company Polyglot has a great deal of knowledge about scheduling particularly when a performance and workshop occur on the same day. Affording enough time for performers to move comfortably from one task to another is essential. The unique demands of performing a bilingual show, and delivering a workshop to deaf children (some of them with other disabilities to contend), however, does not seem to have been taken into account in scheduling this tour. As this was the first Auslan tour that Polyglot have

delivered it seems likely that this knowledge will now be integrated into any the planning of any future tours.

Some of the challenges, as has already been mentioned, related to funding and resources. Whilst both Jodee and David were glowing in their assessment of working with Sue Giles, there were other unanticipated issues for Jodee in particular that made simply being a performer in this production impossible:

...when there were no deaf people in the room I became actor/consultant/cultural advisor and language advisor...I kind of had 3 or 4 hats at once which is pretty tiring. If there was just someone sitting there working with Sue I just think it would have made the process a little easier.

It is likely that, once again, these are learnings that can only be made by going through the process but a contingency for unanticipated issues that arise during the process of working with targeted communities would aid Polyglot in being able to better support all their artists.

Deaf Awareness takes time

Jodee Mundy believes that organisations only gain deaf awareness and become culturally sensitive to the Deaf community by going through the experience. She believes that, 'Sue now knows what's required. But it took us going through that process to get there....But with more resources and support and more deaf artists in the room everyone will feel more empowered and then it will really be an authentic collaboration'.

It is not within the scope of this evaluation to measure the impact that this production has had on Polyglot's partnerships with the funding bodies involved in this production, nor whether future funding will be leveraged as a result of it. However, Polyglot's ongoing commitment to evaluating their own goals and aims provides an evidence base for their work that can be passed onto partners and funding bodies, with the hope of leveraging further funding dollars in this area.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- A strategic plan, to develop future bilingual productions and to strengthen partnerships with the Deaf community would maximise the momentum created by this production, both in terms of advocacy and funding that could be achieved through Polyglot's work with this community. Consultation with members of the Deaf community in the planning stages of any future works may serve to streamline the approach taken to meet all of the project aims, but especially in regards to awareness raising of the deaf community amongst the hearing population.
- Better scheduling of performances and workshops to support the performers dealing with the unique demands of this tour would have created a more satisfying experience for one of Polyglot's most important partners – the artists. More time given to discussion between performers and administration staff would support better communication of everyone's needs.
- Should this production tour again, attaching the performance to an introductory Auslan workshop for hearing schools could be one way of enticing schools beyond the Deaf community to participate.
- More research into how to market to the deaf community

before any remount of the show, or engagement of a Deaf-specific organisation, such as Deaf Arts Network, would potentially increase the uptake of the tour. As Polyglot already produces several largely non-verbal, tactile productions, learning how to market to the Deaf community could be a huge step towards providing more deaf children with access to rich theatre experiences. This would also function to include members of the Deaf community into mainstream theatre experiences, via a product that already has a great appeal to many different communities throughout the world.



DRAW SOMETHING YOU REMEMBER FROM MUCKHEAP

