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In My Skin 2014

Evaluation of Polyglot Theatre's multi-year arts partnership with Mahogany Rise Primary School.

Prepared by Ricci-Jane Adams, PhD.
Creative Knowledge Collaborations
For Polyglot Theatre
December 2014

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Published by Polyglot Theatre, Melbourne, 2014.

<http://www.polyglottheatre.com>

The author can be contacted at: riccijadams@gmail.com

<http://www.creativeknowledgecollaborations.com/>

In My Skin – An evaluation of Polyglot Theatre’s multi-year arts partnership with Mahogany Rise Primary School.

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INTRODUCTION

IN 2012, Polyglot Theatre began a partnership with Mahogany Rise Primary School as part of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Department's Strategic Partnership Program and Arts Victoria's Extended School Residency Program. Whilst the usual model of funding would have seen Polyglot move on to work with other schools in the region, such was the success and overall satisfaction of the partnership that Polyglot Theatre advocated for the continuation of this pairing with this school for a further two years. The ongoing partnership model was accommodated by the DEECD and in 2014 Polyglot delivered the third and final year of the Kids In Control residency at this school (under the current funding arrangement).

Polyglot Theatre led by project artistic director, Kate Kantor, worked with the year 5/6 students at the school two times per week over 7 weeks across 2 terms. 5 artists delivered the project with the support of three project staff. Workshops ran at Monterey Secondary College from 23 July until 12 September, with a two-week season at the CUBE 37 Gallery, Frankston Arts Centre.

Exploring identity and focusing on positive social connections between young people at the primary and high school, kids explored live VJing, dance, music and film in the creation of their performance piece.

Students made films that reflected the interests and desire lines of each child and how they respond to themes of transition, resilience and identity.

Mahogany Rise Primary School, Monterey Secondary College and region

Mahogany Rise Primary School and Monterey Secondary College are located in an area of economic and social disadvantage within the City of Frankston. Compared to Victoria as a whole, this area:

- Has more single person households and more single parent families
- Is more disadvantaged by a range of measures including unemployment, resident income and level of education
- Has more homes that are being purchased or rented from the government, and fewer that are owned
- Has more Indigenous but fewer non-English speaking residents.
- Has lower levels of participation in activities like organised groups and organised sport.

Mahogany Rise Primary School is a small school that has a particular focus on improving the literacy and oral language skills of its students. The school has struggled to involve the wider community including families in the day to day operation of the school. Mahogany Rise is home to a number of specialised programs and partnerships including:

- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Southern Metropolitan 'Student Development Centre'
- Frankston North Noah's Ark Inc., part of Victoria's largest Early Childhood Intervention and Inclusion Support Program for children with additional needs
- The Mahogany Rise Early Learning Centre and
- Ardoch Youth Foundation, Frankston North.

Most children enter school around two years behind the state average.

Monterey Secondary College is a small secondary college located in close physical proximity to the primary school. The majority of primary school students transition to this high school. A recent community forum at the school noted the need for the school to connect more with the community, and to communicate more effectively across the community. This was the first year that the school was actively involved in the partnership.

Kids in Control Residencies

Polyglot Theatre partnered with Mahogany Rise Primary School as part of Polyglot's Kids in Control Residency program. This program is described in the following way:

Polyglot's Kids In Control Residencies are creative processes, which culminate in a unique, site-specific interactive event reflecting the ideas and artwork of children.

The process works on a number of different scales and lasts anything from two days to six months, ending in a celebratory event, which showcases the children's work to their community and families. (Polyglot Theatre website)

Participating groups

Students

The year 5/6 students at Mahogany Rise Primary School and around 8 year 7 students from Monterey Senior High School participated in the project. At least 5 of the primary school students had participated in the previous year's partnership with Polyglot Theatre. At least 2 of the primary school students had participated in all three years of the partnership.

Teaching staff

Mahogany Rise Primary School teacher, Joanne Costelloe, and classroom aide, Trish were both involved to varying degrees with the activity of the workshops. Monterey Secondary College staff including the principal were extremely supportive of the workshops and participated to varying degrees in the workshop process.

Polyglot Staff and Artists

Kate Kantor –Director

Kate Kantor works as a director, writer, teacher and performer of physical theatre. Since starting work as an actor, acrobat and teacher with TheatreWorks in the early 80's, Kate has been a member of many companies, including Primary Source, The Hunting Party, the Tea Bags Marching Band, Strange Fruit, Circus Oz and Melbourne Playback Theatre. After training at the Victorian College of the Arts, Kate studied with and then worked as the assistant to Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux in Paris. In the late 90's, she formed The Business, independent physical theatre company, as well as working as a performer with Circus Oz, touring Europe, Asia and the UK. Upon her return, she worked as Performance Studies Co-ordinator and Clown Lecturer at the National Institute of Circus Arts and continues to work as Arts in Education Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Victoria University. She has worked as a director/ teacher/ artist in residence with many diverse groups including The Australian Opera, Frumpus, Anthill Theatre, the Victorian College of the Arts, Rawcus Theatre, The Village, Polyglot Theatre, Back to Back Theatre, University of Melbourne, Victoria University and numerous schools and communities in both metropolitan and regional Australia. This year Kate is working on a new play with The Business.

Lis Blake - Community Collaborations Producer

Beginning her career as an English and Drama teacher in an inner city London school, Lis decided that there were more effective and creative ways of making social change. She went on to spend 10 years in the UK as a theatre director, teacher, project manager and producer, working with some of the UK's leading artists and theatre organisations, including the National, Orange Tree and Half Moon. She specialises in working with people who are excluded. Between 2001 – 2005, she worked at Theatre Resource, being responsible for producing and co-delivering *Pathways into Creative Learning*, delivering arts-based learning with disabled and deaf communities, mental health service users and children and adults with experience of the care system. Other highlights included collaborating on the creation of a DVD of art, animation and music with unaccompanied minors from Iran, Iraq, Eritrea and the Sudan and directing *Lavender's Blue* – the premier UK tour of a new play devised by and working with young actors who all had experience of being homeless or in care. Since arriving in Australia, Lis has worked at Polyglot Theatre managing school residencies in Frankston North, producing *Expecting Something?*, a two year creative project with young mums and their babies, developing training and a care plan for artists working with children and adults who have experienced trauma, and developing Polyglot's new Community Strategy.

Jason Heller - filmmaker

Jason Heller is a Melbourne based filmmaker. Jason produces narrative and experimental screen-based work, as well as regularly videographing documentation for various art and community based projects. Recent documentary projects include producing 'Quietly Settled', a short documentary about Palestinian-Iraqi refugees, for Amnesty International to present at the UNHCR Refugee Conference in Geneva and 'Share and Be Aware' to raise awareness of bicycle safety for motorists. Jason is

currently working with Polyglot Theatre in an extended residency at Mahogany Rise Primary School in Frankston North working in video-making with Grade 5-6's.

Other recent projects include producing the award winning 'West Park Proposition' multi-channel video artwork for artist Ash Keating and music videos for Melbourne groups NO ZU and Lost Animal. Jason has also worked with DVA Theatre Company (disability arts group), Melbourne Workers Theatre, Footscray Community Arts Centre, North Richmond Community Health Centre, Godwin Bradbeer retrospective (Shepparton Art Gallery), Claudio Del Fierro (Chile - South Project), as well as producing 'What Do You Think Of Me?' an Israeli/Palestinian art project. Jason is committed to working with community based organisations, particularly focussed on human rights and social justice issues.

Nick Barlow - Animator / Performer

Nick completed his honours degree in Visual and Performing Arts at the VCA in 2000. Since that time he has worked primarily as a puppet designer, builder and performer with Snuff Puppets, including tours to England, Singapore, China, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Hong Kong, South Korea, Germany and Taiwan. He has also worked with Polyglot Theatre (*Tooth and Claw*, Chookas Festival, Shopping Baby), Arena Theatre Company (*The Outlookers*, *Gamegirl*) and most recently as resident puppet designer, performer and committee member of Peepshow Inc. (*Puppet Peepshow*, *Mysteries of the Convent*, *Slanting into the Void*, *The Hill*, *Aftermath*).

Nick also performs and conducts workshops in Japanese drumming with Toshi Sakamoto and his group Wadaiko Rindo. With this group he has performed in schools, parks, festivals and auditoriums all over Australia as well as in Fiji and New Caledonia.

During this time Nick has also produced artwork and animation for theatre, film and online.

Sean Henley – Digital Artist

Enio Pozzebon - Musician

Enio has spent his career exploring potentials within the many areas of the performing arts. Performance, education, composition and multimedia creation have given him a broad range of sensitivities allowing him to communicate to a diverse audience. From an almost lifelong association with NMIT-Performing Arts Department as a teacher/program coordinator to musical director and sound designer for musical theatre and theatre productions (NICA, Arts Access Victoria, Mechination Theatre Ensemble, Djilpin Arts), and as a performer/pianist/vocalist (Polyglot Theatre, Drowsy Drivers, Belvoir Theatre, Half Arsed Three, Bella Ciao) diversity remains a vital element of Enio's career.

John Gray – Choreographer

Leaving New Zealand for Australia at the age of 17 years to pursue formal dance studies, John has been working and studying as a professional dancer ever since. For the past 15 years he has also been teaching dance to students of all ages: "I love

watching the uncoordinated become swift and competent in their movements. It seriously brings a tear to your eye as a mentor.”

John is now passionate about and focused on nurturing the younger generation. He regularly works with the Anti Racism Action Band, a community-based performing arts program in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, where he engages youth through dance, singing and acting.

Polyglot Theatre is Australia’s leading creator of experiential, interactive and installation theatre for children and families, encouraging kids to turn the simplest things into extraordinary creations.

Inspired by the artwork, play and ideas of children, we create imagined worlds where audiences actively participate in performance through touch, play and encounter. For over 30 years, Polyglot has ignited children’s imaginations from tiny Australian country towns to the world’s leading arts centres.

Funding Partners



In My Skin evaluation

The purpose of the In My Skin evaluation was to focus on two key aims. These were:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of In My Skin’s approach to achieve the intended impacts of the project for the key stakeholders, specifically the students and wider school community.
- To evaluate the key outcomes as documented in the project plan and to identify other unanticipated outcomes of significance.

Creative Knowledge Collaborations was engaged in January 2014 to conduct an evaluation of the project with the final report due in December 2014.

METHODOLOGY

The following broad evaluation framework was used to guide the evaluation of the project.

Evaluation Framework

	Participants	project/ organisation	Community	
process	how participants are involved in the project	how the project is managed	how the community is involved in the project	process
impact	what happens to, or for, participants through the project	what happens as result of the project	what happens to or for the community through the project	impact
outcome	what happens to, or for, participants in the long term as a result of the project	what happens in the long term, as a result of the project	what happens to, or for, the community in the long term as a result of the project	outcome
	Participants	project/ organisation	Community	

The effectiveness of the project aims was evaluated through the use of the above matrix¹. Each of the project aims was mapped onto the matrix to establish the degree to which the program achieved its aims for key stakeholders including children, artists, and the wider community.

This framework enabled the project to be evaluated in terms of:

- processes for participant involvement; project management and community involvement
- the impact of the project for participants, the project/organisation and the community
- outcomes of the project for participants, the project/organisation and the community (including the longer term issues of sustainability).

Although longer-term outcomes had not been specified as part of the In My Skin project goals, the evaluation had the opportunity to track several students across two and in one case three years of the partnership.

¹ Keating, C Evaluating Community Arts and Community Wellbeing Guide, prepared for Arts Victoria, VicHealth, the City of Darebin and Whittlesea Shire Council, 2002.

EVALUATION FOCUS	TARGET GROUP	IN MY SKIN PROJECT GOALS
PROCESS	PARTICIPANT	To help the students learn how to make films, to learn how to VJ and make dances.
	PROJECT	Produce one whole-project film and one mini-film per child
	COMMUNITY	Participation in public event at Frankston Arts Centre
IMPACT	PARTICIPANT	Increased self-esteem, self-knowledge, creative capacity, individual voice, capacity to cope and to trust, improve adult-child communication and emotional articulation
	PROJECT	Demonstration of the quality of the creative process, the partnership and the young people's ideas around identity, personal strength and aspirations
	COMMUNITY	Strengthen friendships and relationships between young people so that they can establish a reliable support network
OUTCOMES	PARTICIPANT	Give students a vehicle with which to share their own wisdom and experience with others.
	PROJECT	Showcase the good stuff of young people in the local community – to be recognised by their community as strong, enthusiastic energetic individuals who can make a difference.
	COMMUNITY	Create a tool that can be used not only for future classes leaving the school but for others in the education sector

INFORMATION COLLECTION AND DATA SETS

Embodied ethnography, drawing, performed re-enactments of key moments and semi-structured focus groups and surveys were employed to capture feedback directly from students.

In addition the following data was gathered across the project:

- Weekly artist feedback
- Longitudinal data across two years of the project from 5 students. This data set includes survey data with qualitative responses as well as interviews and written reflections
- Weekly workshop reports from Polyglot project manager
- Artistic director's workshop plans
- Polyglot team round-table debrief at conclusion of project
- Post-activity reflection with students
- Video footage of student to student interviews
- Document analysis including funding applications.

KEY FINDINGS

This section of the report provides a summary of the key findings from the evaluation.

Working through a partnership between Polyglot Theatre, Mahogany Rise Primary School and Frankston Arts Centre, in 2014, the In My Skin Project involved:

- A team of six artists and
- Two project staff
- Working across two schools
- With two principals, one lead teacher and around five other teaching staff and
- Approximately 30 students.

The process was managed by Polyglot Theatre (as part of their Kids In Control Residency program). Polyglot worked closely with both schools. The other organisation linked to the project was Frankston Arts Centre (FAC).

Year 5/6 students from Mahogany Rise Primary School (MRPS) participated in twice-weekly workshops at Monterey Secondary College with the Polyglot team under the supervision of the coordinating teacher. Around 8 year 7 students, participants in the previous year's residency at the primary school, also documented the process on film. Art forms included vjing, dance, performance, visual art and film. The residency culminated in a one-off public performance at FAC followed by a two week exhibition in the Cube at the FAC. Around 140 people, adults and children, attended the performance.

Overall, the project's reach was wide and deep and exceeded the previous years in this sense. The final outcome in the public space of the FAC to an audience over 130 people made a significant contribution to the reach of the project in 2014.

The impact of the In My Skin Project

For the students

In 2014, the combination of small groups, more artists and project staff, and the inclusion of dance as an art form resulted in a high levels of student engagement and student satisfaction.

Small group activities proved to be the most engaging and artistically satisfying way in which the artists worked with the students. In this way, the support and connection offered to individual students from the Polyglot team was maximised. Students were positively relating to adults who were keenly and genuinely interested in their artistic contributions.

Artists observed positive changes in individual students with challenging behaviour over the course of the workshops, and a shift towards self-regulating behaviour.

The success of Dance as an art form

Dance was introduced as a primary creative form in 2014, and this was particularly successful with large male student cohort, many of whom had previous experience with hip hop in particular. Dance was described as 'the unifying element' of the project by the artistic team. The majority of students were keen to participate in this aspect of the project. Students who were not engaging with the project in other ways demonstrated keen interest in the dance component.

The students valued being able to create their own dances rather than just imitating 'what they see on you tube' according to artistic director, Kate Kantor.

The inclusion of choreographer John Gray, as part of the Polyglot team was a very successful element of the project and he was particularly popular with the student cohort. As Kate goes on to state, 'With John, the kids were extremely excited about dancing'. John demonstrated a keen and genuine interest in the students, and on several occasions was able to connect to students who were otherwise disengaged from the process, or characteristically problematic behaviourally.

Dance was integrated into other aspects of the project including setting up film shoots in which the students danced in various locations they liked around the school. Whilst the boys were very keen to participate, the smaller number of girls also enjoyed dance made their own dance group.

Engagement with this physical, creative form is particularly positive for this cohort and aligns strongly with the key aims of the project. As the American Dance Therapy Association states, 'Dance is movement. Movement is change. Moving with one's whole body, with and against gravity, one learns to both yield and resist, to feel one's strength and to feel one's vulnerability, to try on new qualities of action and behaviour. This is what it means to be fully human'.

Student feedback

Dance and acting were highlights for the students. Only one person recalled filming as a highlight from the workshops process. Many students described filming as being difficult.

From the public performance event, Jayden's theatrical performance was a particular highlight. The final event, from the food to the large audience, had a significant and positive impact on the students.

Students were asked to self-rate their participation in the workshops and final performance on a scale of 1-5 (5 being the best they could do). Embodied ethnography was used, involving students positioning themselves physically at a

particular location in the classroom designating the numbers 1-5. Once they had made their choice, students were asked to articulate why they had rated themselves in that way. The students generally rated their contributions well. Below are a selection of responses:

I enjoyed it and I took part in everything (5)

I participated but I didn't try my hardest (4)

I was proud of every single bit of it (5).

For the Schools

As a result of the project in 2014, there is now a stronger link forged between the two schools. Polyglot was well supported by the partnership with high school, which was able to provide more space, better resources and a greater sense of enthusiasm for the project than was evident in previous year under a different principal.

The positive shift in focus from the primary school to the high school was contributed to in multiple ways, not all of which were positive in themselves but yielded a good outcome. First, the project took place in the physical space of the high school for the first time. Second, the level of enthusiasm demonstrated by the new principal and teaching staff at the high school facilitated a positive experience for all staff. Finally, the lead teacher from the primary school on the project for the first two years was no longer employed at the school. The new teacher demonstrated a distinct lack of commitment to the project. The new teacher was also not effectively recruited into the project or made aware of the role that she could potentially play. The teacher appeared to have little interest in pursuing this on her own behalf.

As one of the key considerations of the project is how best to support primary school students in Year 6 to make a smooth transition to high school, situating the project at Monterey Secondary College was an excellent move for the project as a whole in 2014. It was very powerful for the students to inhabit spaces that will become theirs in the new year. As well as this, students now have some connection to teaching staff at the high school through a positive and creative engagement.

Of all the art forms offered by the residency, access to professional dancer is perhaps the most exciting and innovative. This is because it is generally the hardest to access and deliver well. AusDance, the peak body for professional dance in Australia, states that, 'Dance now has equal status with other art forms in the curriculum and needs resources to match the more traditional art forms like visual arts and music'. AusDance argue that the Australian curriculum needs the following to be successfully implemented in schools:

Dance in secondary schools is more specialised, and more high-level teacher training will be needed if dance is to be a widely accessible art form in all secondary schools. To make this work, we need:

- Dance education included in primary teacher training courses.
- More secondary dance specialists trained by our tertiary institutions.
- Better access for teachers to artists-in-schools programs².

Polyglot's partnership with both the primary and secondary school in Frankston North goes some way to meeting these goals and could be powerfully extended in future years.

This further supports the idea of an ongoing partnership between Monterey Secondary College and Polyglot. MSC have had great success as part of the Rock Eisteddfod challenge in previous years and have a positive relationship to dance as an art form throughout the school. Increasing the school's access to professional dance educators would sit well with the school's history and future creative potential.

Sustainability

There are two primary areas that could be developed in future iterations of the program to ensure maximum reach and sustainability of the learning. These include:

- Offering and formalising teachers' Professional Development, and
- Linking the schools to Frankston Arts Centre and wider community.

According to the artistic team, transferring knowledge to engaged teachers is a far more powerful way of ensuring student access to the creative activity introduced by Polyglot. This includes extending into future years in which teachers are able to apply their learning to new classroom settings. Whilst previous years of the project have included a whole-school one-off professional development for staff, this is too isolated to be truly valuable and ensure a cultural shift towards the arts in the school.

Instead, offering the residency as a formal professional development opportunity for the staff involved could facilitate recruiting the lead teacher/s into the project more fully. This would require a new approach from Polyglot Theatre towards offering professional development as an aspect of their overall operations.

In addition, developing the connection between Frankston Arts Centre and the schools could ensure sustained involvement and connection to professional artists/arts organisations even when Polyglot is no longer involved.

² <http://ausdance.org.au/projects/details/resourcing-teachers-to-deliver-dance-in-the-australian-curriculum>

SURVEY RESULTS

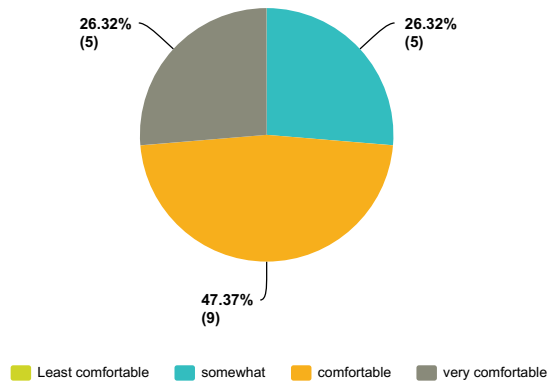
Surveys were conducted with the Year 5/6 students at the beginning and the end of the project and used to measure intrinsic benefits of the project. These benefits are directly connected to the project aims as outlined earlier in the report.

Week One

RJA

Q1 How comfortable are you sharing your opinions and ideas?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



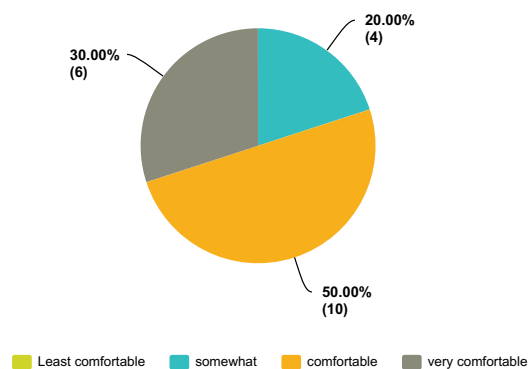
	Least comfortable	somewhat	comfortable	very comfortable	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	0.00% 0	26.32% 5	47.37% 9	26.32% 5	19	3.00

Final week

RJA

Q1 How comfortable are you sharing your opinions and ideas?

Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



	Least comfortable	somewhat	comfortable	very comfortable	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	0.00% 0	20.00% 4	50.00% 10	30.00% 6	20	3.10

1 / 1

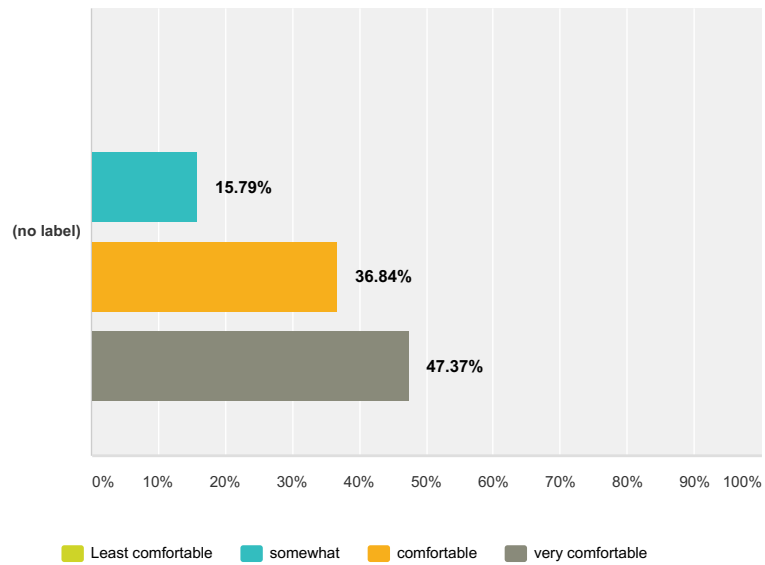
As a result of participation in the project, the students reported increased levels of comfort (*comfortable* and *very comfortable*) in sharing their opinions and ideas.

Week One

RJA

Q3 How comfortable are you communicating with teachers or other adults?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



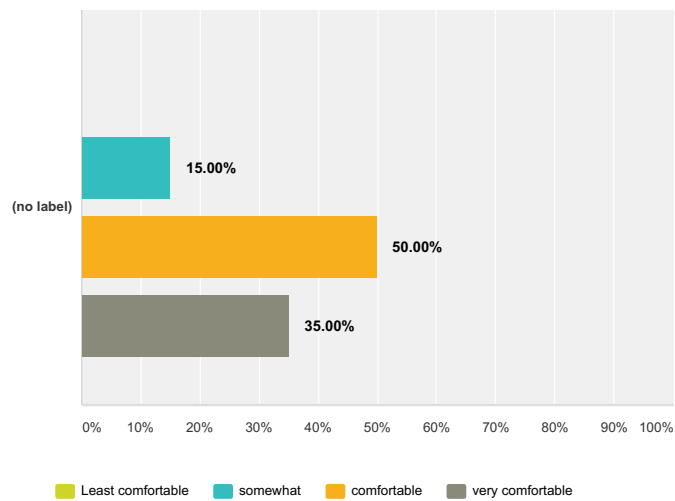
	Least comfortable	somewhat	comfortable	very comfortable	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	0.00% 0	15.79% 3	36.84% 7	47.37% 9	19	3.32

Final week

RJA

Q3 How comfortable are you communicating with teachers or other adults?

Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



	Least comfortable	somewhat	comfortable	very comfortable	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	0.00% 0	15.00% 3	50.00% 10	35.00% 7	20	3.20

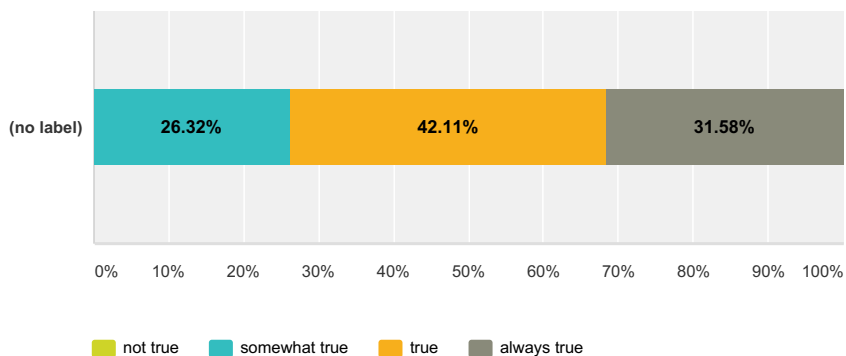
In the course of participating in the project, more students generally felt comfortable communicating with adults, but 2 of the students reported a reduction in the level of comfort from very comfortable to comfortable.

Week One

RJA

Q4 I can express my emotions through my voice

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



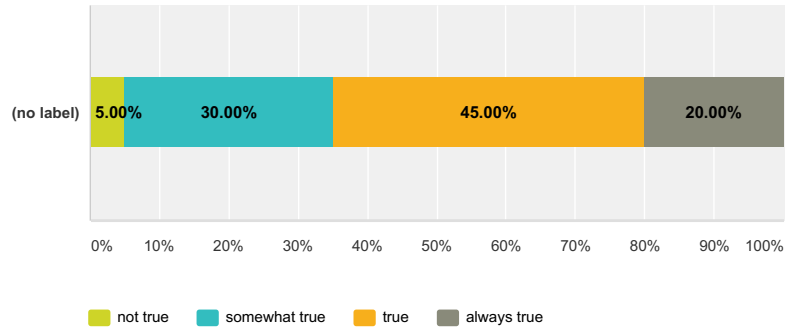
	not true	somewhat true	true	always true	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	0.00% 0	26.32% 5	42.11% 8	31.58% 6	19	3.05

Final Week

RJA

Q4 I can express my emotions through my voice

Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



	not true	somewhat true	true	always true	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	5.00% 1	30.00% 6	45.00% 9	20.00% 4	20	2.80

1 / 1

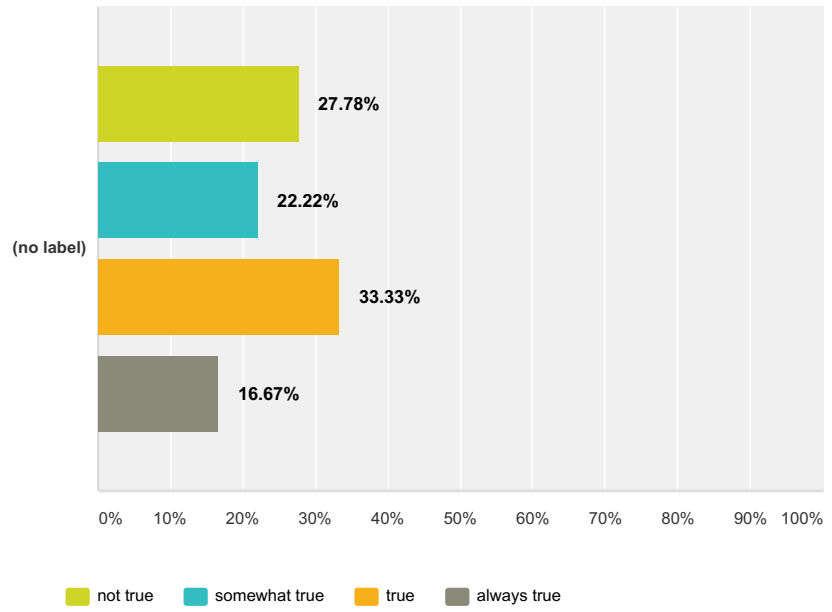
As a result of participation in the project students reported that it was more often true they could express their emotions through their voice. Significantly, 4 students reported that their emotional expression through their voice was reduced from always true to true. The results could reflect a greater capacity for emotional reflection.

Week One

RJA

Q14 I like to be challenged

Answered: 18 Skipped: 1



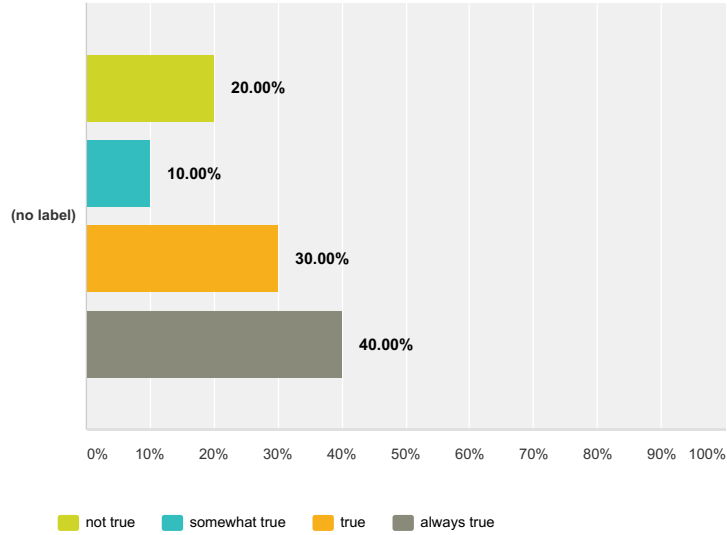
	not true	somewhat true	true	always true	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	27.78% 5	22.22% 4	33.33% 6	16.67% 3	18	2.39

Final Week

RJA

Q14 I like to be challenged

Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



	not true	somewhat true	true	always true	Total	Weighted Average
(no label)	20.00% 4	10.00% 2	30.00% 6	40.00% 8	20	2.90

1 / 1

As a result of participation in the project there was a significant increase in the number of students who reported always liking to be challenged. The figure rose from around 16% at the beginning of the project to 40% by the conclusion of the project. As a central aim of the project was to increase students' capacity to cope this is a remarkable result.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has evaluated the In My Skin project. It has examined the process, impacts and outcomes of the project. It has found that the project has involved:

- around 30 students from two schools
- working with 5 artists and 3 production staff, and
- at least 3 teaching staff, two lead teachers and two principals.

The project was successfully managed by Polyglot Theatre with support from the two schools. The project adapted to the change in lead teacher with the inclusion of more project staff support and this mitigated the loss of the lead teacher to a good extent.

The evaluation has found there to be significant impacts for students participating in the project, from skills development through to emotional literacy. This is evident not only in feedback from students, but validated by teachers and other professionals working with them. From the perspective of students, the overwhelming feedback is that the project was enjoyable and 'awesome' when involved in the In My Skin workshop activities, and through their performance felt 'enthusiastic, excited and proud'.

Students also developed skills and abilities that are consistent with the Australian Essential Learning Standards, including in the dimensions of creating and making, exploring and responding, movement and physical activity, building social relationships, working in teams, reading, writing, viewing and speaking and listening. Teachers and artists reported that many students improved in their self-esteem, self-knowledge, creative capacity, individual voice, capacity to cope and to trust, adult-child communication and emotional articulation. Professionals working with students also observed students' increased focus, commitment and capacity to engage through participating in In My Skin. These are positive outcomes for any school-based extracurricular activity, but are even more significant in the context of exposure to trauma and social disadvantage amongst this student cohort.

At an organisational level, the project enabled new or stronger relationships to develop across both schools and with the Frankston Arts Centre.

The evaluation can only conclude positively about the two-school approach and strengthening ties with the local performing arts centre.

Three years into the partnership it is apparent the impact of the residency at MRPS should be viewed from a wider perspective. The UN Committee on the Rights of The Child recently rearticulated the need for children to have access to play as a daily activity for a range of intrinsic reasons. They point out that, 'Play and recreation facilitate children's capacities to negotiate, regain emotional balance, resolve conflicts and make decisions. Through their involvement in play and recreation, children learn by doing; they explore and experience the world around them;

experiment with new ideas, roles and experiences and in so doing, learn to understand and construct their social position within the world'. The report goes on to state:

The urban population, especially in developing countries, is increasing significantly, as is violence worldwide in all its forms – at home, in schools, in mass media, in the streets. The implications, along with the commercialization of play provisions, are influencing the ways children engage in recreation, as well as in cultural and artistic activities. For many children in both rich and poor countries, child labour, domestic work or increasing educational demands serve to reduce the time available for the enjoyment of these rights.

In an environment such as MRPS in which children often lack the familial support in the provision of consistent home lives, and in which the pressure on schools to deliver core subjects with a focus on numeracy and literacy is inflexible, the opportunity to access a rich imaginative life through play and creativity is severely diminished.

- All students reported enjoying doing In My Skin, especially when allowed the freedom to express their individual voice through their preferred creative task
- Most students demonstrated high levels of engagement with the workshops and developed their individual creative capacities
- Several students developed their emotional articulation through the support of a mentoring relationship with the artists
- Most students felt happy, excited and proud when performing at the In My Skin final public performance.

These results are both straightforward and profound in the context that this work occurred. Located in one of the most disadvantaged outer urban areas in Melbourne, the students of Mahogany Rise Primary school face the acute educational, familial, social and employment challenges typified by low socio-economic communities. The SEIFA index of disadvantage sits at 812.3 for this area. AEDI statistics show that Frankston North children are particularly vulnerable and the 2009 data showed that 70.4% were considered vulnerable in one or more domains compared with 25.1% for the whole Local Government Area, and 23.6 for Australia.

The results meet the key aims of the project and of the essential successful characteristics of a longitudinal arts partnership in an educational context. They speak most eloquently to the project's success in allowing children to develop an individual voice, to build trust in significant adult-child relationship outside of the familial and educational contexts, and to develop creative and communication skills not readily available in the day to day curriculum. Most importantly the young people are given time to play, experiment and take creative risks under the care and skill of high quality professional artists.