

# 2017

## ALTOGETHER

Report on Polyglot Theatre's multi-year arts partnership with Mahogany Rise Primary School



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Creative Knowledge Collaborations  
For Polyglot Theatre  
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*Altogether* 2017 – An evaluation of Polyglot Theatre’s multi-year arts partnership with Mahogany Rise Primary School.

Cover page image credit: Theresa Harrison

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## Executive Summary

“I think Polyglot is a fun thing to do. It is very adventurous because you never know where they will take you in the land of the imagination.”

- A.M. Year 5/6 Student

“Even silently working on something together, drawing something together, making something together, not talking to each other, just being with each other, having a shared input into the one task or the one project which we are all obviously sharing, this one project.”

- Nick Barlow, Polyglot Artist

The aim of this report is to provide an evaluation of the 2017 creative partnership between Mahogany Rise Primary School and Polyglot Theatre. This year’s project, an eight week residency in which Polyglot artists collaborated with the Year 5/6 class culminated in *Altogether*, a film and live performance event presented to the school and wider community on 15 Sept, 2017. This project represents the seventh and final year of Polyglot collaborations with the school community. As the Mahogany Rise/Polyglot arts residency program is concluding, a separate longitudinal report reviewing the nature and impact of this long-term creative engagement between school and theatre company will be available in December, 2017.

For the 2017 residency, funding came from *Newsboys Foundation* and *Sidney Myer Fund*, with additional funding and in-kind support provided directly from Mahogany Rise PS.

The report has been prepared by Christine Sinclair on behalf of the independent Evaluation company, Creative Knowledge Collaborations. This evaluation presents findings drawn from an analysis of information provided by a range of key stakeholders involved in the project: children, teachers, Polyglot artists and project staff, and from other relevant sources such as planning and communication documents, websites and historical data.

### Project Aims

The purpose of this evaluation was to establish the effectiveness of the project in terms of meeting the project aims. These aims were determined by Polyglot prior to the commencement of the project and are in line with the longitudinal goals that Polyglot and Mahogany Rise PS have been pursuing together over the last seven years of the partnership. The aims are as follows:

- A. **Child-focused aims.** To establish the effectiveness of the partnership in terms of meeting the project aims for the child participants. Working with children with limited exposure to the arts to:
- Improve children’s socio-emotional skills,
  - Increase children’s engagement and success at school,
  - Develop children’s confidence in their creativity and abilities,
  - Improve children’s social cohesion/inclusion,

- Increase community awareness of kids' creative capacities and the effectiveness of an arts project in schools.

B. **Partnership-focused aims.** To establish the effectiveness of the partnership in terms of meeting the project aims for the key stakeholders of artists and teaching staff. The project aims to:

- Enable staff to think beyond their usual practice,
- Grow the artists' creative practice and understanding as a result of working with kids,
- Enable children, artists and teachers to work together in a mutual and respectful way to create something new.

## Description of the project

In Term 3, 2017 the Polyglot team undertook an extended residency at Mahogany Rise Primary School, working with 27 students in a composite Year 5/6 class. The team consisted of five artists: a Project Director (Sue Giles, Artistic Director of Polyglot); a freelance physical theatre artist and designer; a freelance theatre-maker; a filmmaker; and a musician who was also the newly appointed creative arts teacher at Mahogany Rise; and a production manager.

The children participated in a wide range of exploratory workshop activities including drama games, Big Draw, costume making with paper and masking tape, animation and musical composition. The idea of transition, from primary to secondary school was an underlying principle but specific themes (secret worlds - what lies beneath; individual identity; emerging identities) ultimately emerged from the children in dialogue and creative collaboration with the artists. The children were involved in the making of a short film in which they both conceived of the scenes and composed and performed the musical score. In the final performance event, the showing of the film was accompanied by live action scenes. The performance concluded with a powerful moment in which the children burst through a paper 'wall' that they had constructed and designed with their own artwork. Frankston Arts Centre exhibited the film of *Altogether* at Cube 37 – *Art After Dark* from 18 September to 1 October 2017.

## Key findings

The 2017 Polyglot residency was a highly successful collaboration between the theatre company and the primary school.

In addition to the achievement of all key project aims, the residency clearly demonstrated that the long-term relationship between Polyglot and the school community contributed to a more smoothly run project with more effective communications between key stakeholders. It was also a factor in incremental change within the school community contributing to a growth in creativity and cultural pursuits within the school into the future.

Further, the evaluation revealed that immersion in a high quality, challenging and child-led arts project has the potential to contribute to the development of general capabilities as identified by ACARA<sup>1</sup> as pivotal to a student's capacity to become a successful learner in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup>ACARA – Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority  
<http://v7-5.australiancurriculum.edu.au/generalcapabilities/overview/general-capabilities-in-the-australian-curriculum>

Many of the students participating in this year's Polyglot program demonstrated evidence of improvements in two of the general capabilities identified by ACARA, ie *critical and creative thinking*, and *personal and social capability*, with potential impacts also on *Literacy* and *Numeracy* (these latter were not measured in this evaluation). The Evaluation revealed that *Altogether* made an important contribution to the lives of the children of Year 5/6, to their capacity to become successful learners, and confident and creative individuals.

"I think it's definitely shown that they're now willing to have a go, even if it's not right. Even down to their writing and their maths. Before they've just gone 'too difficult, can't do it' and they'll push it to one side. Now they will sit and they will look and they will go 'hmm, I'm not sure' and they're willing to ask each other for peer help. They'll ask questions more frequently. So it's been really nice for them to go 'well this is not what I was expecting but I can do it'. So it does give them their own personal belief that it's tricky to start with but it's achievable."

**-Charlotte Hewson (Year 5/6 teacher, Interview)**

The key findings from the evaluation which relate specifically to project aims, are as follows:

1. The composition of the Polyglot team of several experienced artists from diverse backgrounds provided the necessary pre-conditions for the achievement of an artistically rich, multi-art, child-led creative project which supported positive outcomes for both children and artists.
2. Mahogany Rise Primary School and Polyglot were able to enter the 2017 project with trust and mutual respect based on the previous years of working together.
3. The building of relationships and the creation of a 'safe space' were fundamental building blocks to the successful outcomes of this project.
4. A culture of 'Yes' and 'freedom to choose' contributed to the agency of the children within and beyond the Polyglot workshops.
5. The children demonstrated burgeoning confidence and agency as the Polyglot workshops progressed, demonstrating an increase in their socio-emotional capacities and the impact of a longer-term residency.
6. The Polyglot process of transforming workshop ideas into live or filmed performance outcomes contributed significantly to the achievement of four of the five project aims:
  - Improve children's socio-emotional skills
  - Increase children's engagement and success at school
  - Develop children's confidence in their creativity and abilities
  - Improve children's social cohesion/inclusion
7. The performance event increased the community's awareness of the creative and leadership attributes of the children.
8. Due to the unfamiliar and unstructured nature of many of the workshop activities, many children had to overcome significant fears in order to fully participate in the project, including fear of failure and of the unknown.
9. The introduction of a creative arts program at Mahogany Rise in 2017 indicates cultural change at the school, and the mentoring and support for a key staff member to fulfil that role suggests capacity building is taking place within the current staff.

## Challenges

Major challenges to the fulfillment of project aims in this year's project centered on:

- Sustaining the involvement and engagement of all children in the arts activities offered by the Polyglot team in the open-ended child-led process.
- Maintaining a focus on the underlying theme of transition from primary to secondary school despite less involvement from Monterey Secondary College in 2017.
- Establishing the framework for supporting the Polyglot legacy (a creative arts program) at Mahogany Rise PS into the future.

While the report has flagged some potential challenges for the successful transition from a yearly Polyglot residency at Mahogany Rise to an autonomous creative arts program run within the school, the evidence of cultural change over time is a powerful endorsement of sustained arts engagement in this school.

“To Sue and all the others who’ve been down here with us I do want to give a heart felt thanks for all the fabulous work that’s taken place and the way in which you have enriched the lives of many young people over the past six or seven years because this is a really great legacy you’ve left with this community. Not just with this group of students but all the ones who’ve gone through before... It’s been a fabulous experience...”

**-John Culley, Principal, Mahogany Rise PS**



## Introduction

Vignette: It's 5.30 on a Friday afternoon at Mahogany Rise Primary School, but not just any Friday afternoon. The excitement and nervous energy in the small but well-loved and well-used school hall is palpable. 26 busy, focused 11 and 12 year olds are making the final preparations for the transformation of the hall into cinema, live theatre venue and art gallery. There is an abundance of masking tape, brown paper and bubble wrap. Strange creatures appear out of the dark shadows – Inferno Lord prepares to terrify unsuspecting audience members, oversized babies and bunnies hop, and a small, intense boy inspects the cable connections that will enable him to operate the smoke machine from the inside of his cocoon. In another part of the hall a group of musicians test microphones and do last minute rehearsals of their musical accompaniment to the film and live action cocoons.



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

Timing is everything. In amongst the whirlwind intensity of the preparations, some adults can be observed. They too are excited, focused, nervous. They work alongside their young collaborators, doing a quick masking tape costume repair, listening to a Year 6 girl practice her speech – her first ever, explaining what the job of an usher is, seeking advice on the state of the screen that all the children will break through in the final moments of the performance. Soon, the family audience will be arriving. One of the adults, Sue, gathers the group together for some final words – a few last minute changes, a couple of reminders of things learned from the earlier performance in front of the school, some encouragement. The object of the game is for everyone to clap at the same time, but without anyone leading – the excitement is elevated to an ever higher pitch – the group do one last game of Clap. There is a single, resounding Clap, and as one, the group knows what they have achieved.

The aim of this report is to provide an evaluation of the 2017 project between Mahogany Rise Primary School and Polyglot Theatre. This year's project, an eight week residency in which Polyglot artists collaborated with the Year 5/6 class culminated in *Altogether*, a film and live performance event presented to the school and wider community on 15 Sept, 2017. This project represents the seventh and final year of Polyglot collaborations with the school community. The evaluation therefore, seeks to understand the effectiveness of project aims and the impact of the Polyglot program on the participants: the 27 Year 5/6 students. The evaluation also reports on the effectiveness of project aims for key stakeholders: the Polyglot project team and Mahogany Rise staff.

As this is the final year of the Mahogany Rise/Polyglot arts residency program, a separate longitudinal report, reviewing the nature and impact of this long term creative engagement between school and theatre company, is also being prepared.

The report has been prepared by Christine Sinclair on behalf of the independent Evaluation company, Creative Knowledge Collaborations. This evaluation presents findings drawn from an analysis of information provided by a range of key stakeholders involved in the project – children, teachers, Polyglot artists and project staff, and from other relevant sources such as planning and communication documents, websites and historical data. A set of recommendations which may be pertinent to future school-based and community arts collaborations concludes the report.



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

## Background to the project

### Polyglot - Mahogany Rise Primary School Partnership



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

In 2011 Polyglot Theatre created *City of Riddles*, a collaborative project with two schools in the Frankston North area, one of which was Mahogany Rise Primary School (MRPS). This project saw the beginnings of a long term working relationship between Mahogany Rise Principal John Culley and the Artistic Director Sue Giles, both of whom recognized a shared vision for the potential benefits that rich experiences of the arts could offer the children of this small primary school in Frankston North.

In 2012, Polyglot's Kids in Control (now Kids' Collaborations) undertook their first partnership with Mahogany Rise Primary School (MRPS) with *Knock Knock!*, a long term residency funded through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Department's Strategic Partnership Program and Arts Victoria's Extended School Residency Program. With multi-year funding for some years, Polyglot was able to return each year to conduct an extended residency with the children of Mahogany Rise.

From 2015, funding sources have been more precarious. However Polyglot has continued to conduct a residency at the school in each subsequent year. Beginning with idea of transition as a central premise, the Polyglot projects have explored different thematic content, art forms and approaches, reflecting the child-led nature of the process and the diversity of artists brought in to collaborate with the children. Each project has culminated in a public showing/sharing of the work undertaken by the children – these have included shadow puppetry, dance, acrobatics, film and original music, exhibitions of student work and a guided walk through a local nature reserve. Members of the extended school community come together for these public events in a celebration of the creativity and resilience of the children.



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

Over the seven years of collaboration, the transition from primary to secondary school has been a recurrent point of departure. Since 2013 Monterey Secondary College, the closest secondary school to Mahogany Rise, has played a role in the residencies, with visits to the school for workshops and collaboration with Year 7 and 8 students integrated into the Polyglot projects where possible. Former Mahogany Rise students have reported that the demystifying of the college through this exposure has contributed to a less daunting move into high school at the end of year six.

Polyglot has committed to evaluating the impact of each of the residencies and the long-term impact of Polyglot's involvement with Mahogany Rise. The longitudinal evaluation of data gathered over the course of the long-term partnership will add valuable evidence of the impact of such programs.

## Mahogany Rise Primary School

Mahogany Rise Primary School is located in Frankston North, a suburb with a long history of social and economic disadvantage. In comparison to other suburbs in Victoria, Frankston North has a significant level of single parent families and is highly placed on measures of disadvantage relating to unemployment, income and level of education. Newspaper reports in 2014 drew attention to rising rates of drug related crime in the local area, and Frankston North was identified as an area of particular risk<sup>2</sup>. Travelling to Frankston, a suburban centre with commercial, sporting and cultural facilities just a few kilometres away is considered a 'special occasion' destination, as there are limited public transport options. The Frankston North Community Centre is therefore an important social and cultural hub, offering after school activities for children, amongst other services.

Mahogany Rise is one of two primary schools in Frankston North. Current enrolment is 148 students and 18 full time teaching staff, in addition to a non-teaching support staff (Educational Support, Speech Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Psychological and Paediatric Services). Mahogany Rise currently falls below the national average in the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage<sup>3</sup> and many of the students enter school two years behind the state average.

Mahogany Rise Primary School's mission statement expresses the school's commitment to the preparation of 'active, engaged and responsible citizens' and highlights their teaching and learning focus on 'building capacity in reading, writing, speaking and listening and numeracy in order to ensure that each child has every opportunity to achieve their greatest potential'<sup>4</sup>.

In pursuit of these goals, the school has initiated a number of innovative programs and strategies. The Principal John Culley is committed to practical aspects of student wellbeing and has overseen:

- the crowdfunding of an overseas trip for 9 students in 2013. This program has continued and in 2017, 9 students travelled to India in the semester break.
- the construction of a school kitchen, with the aim to provide both breakfast and lunch to students.

Student wellbeing is also supported by key agencies located on site at the school. Including:

- Ardoch Youth Foundation
- Salvation Army
- On Psych and
- Extended School Services.

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<sup>2</sup> Fairfax Media 8 November, 2014 <http://www.smh.com.au/national/as-crime-surges-in-frankstonmethamphetamines-emerge-as-link-20141107-11i30n.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.myschool.edu.au/SchoolProfile/Index/108229/MahoganyRisePrimarySchool/44926/2016>

<sup>4</sup> Mahogany Rise Primary School Website <http://mahoganyriseps.com/about-us>

# Polyglot Theatre

Polyglot places children at the heart of our art. Our vision is of a future where children are powerful: artistically, socially and culturally.

## Polyglot Manifesto

Polyglot Theatre is Australia's leading creator of interactive and participatory theatre for children and families. Through their distinctive artistic philosophy they are at the international forefront of contemporary arts experiences for babies and children up to 12 years. As an arts organization focusing on the creation of work for and with children, they are professionally lauded by their peers and have received acclaim and recognition internationally. For over 30 years, Polyglot has toured widely, igniting children's imaginations from tiny Australian country towns to the world's leading arts centres.

Inspired by the artwork, play and ideas of children, we create imagined worlds where audiences actively participate in performance through touch, play and encounter.

**Polyglot website**<sup>5</sup>

## The Polyglot process

Over many years, Polyglot has developed and refined a distinctive, highly effective and highly regarded child-centred and child-led way of working with children. Polyglot Theatre describes their process of working with children in the following way:

Polyglot engages children as collaborators at the core of all works. The artists work alongside children to gain the benefit of their insight and energy, to challenge their preconceptions of what children think and how they act and to be inspired by their ease of imaginative engagement. In turn the children are given attention and respect by the artists, made to feel their contributions are valid and interesting and are part of a project that has a horizon often bigger than their own community. Polyglot aims to increase children's confidence in their own creativity. This means ownership and pride in their own work and appreciation of others', willingness to take risks, share ideas and offer suggestions. The result of confidence in creativity is increased self-esteem, increased ability to contribute, to work as a team and to work productively on your own.

This approach is taken in all of Polyglot's work, and was central to the implementation and delivery of the collaboration with Mahogany Rise in 2017. As the process privileges the child's contribution, workshops and outcomes can take time to develop and the energy in the workshop space can appear chaotic. When operating in this school environment, Polyglot staff prepared for their entry into the school with a series of pre-project briefings with key staff, particularly the classroom teacher, and followed this up with regular post-workshop check-ins with the teacher and other participating staff.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.polyglot.org.au/about-us/>

## Kids' Collaborations

In our Kids' Collaborations projects, genuine engagement with communities pulls our process into practical outcomes with measurable social impact. In schools and community settings, children are given room to stretch themselves, play with freedom and develop confidence to forge their own creative paths.

Polyglot Strategic Plan, 2017

Polyglot Theatre originally partnered with MRPS under the umbrella of its Kids in Control Residency program. As a result of the new Polyglot Strategic Plan, this program has now evolved into Kids' Collaborations, under the leadership of Kate Kantor.

## Funding

This residency program was seed funded by Creative Victoria and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. For the 2017 residency, funding came from *Newboys Foundation* and the *Sidney Myer Fund*, with additional funding and in-kind support provided directly from Mahogany Rise PS. Funding for the project also includes the evaluation of both the 2017 residency *Altogether* and the longitudinal evaluation, which will consider the impact of the Polyglot residencies at Mahogany Rise Primary School over a seven year period.



## Project Overview

### Description of the project

In Term 3, 2017 the Polyglot team undertook an extended residency at Mahogany Rise Primary School, working with 27 students in a composite Year 5/6 class. The team consisted of five artists: an Project Director, a freelance physical theatre artist and designer; a freelance theatre-maker; a filmmaker; and a musician who was also the newly appointed creative arts teacher at Mahogany Rise; and a production manager.



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

Over an eight week period, the team visited the school for twelve workshop days, including a whole day introductory workshop and a whole day for final rehearsals and a performance presentation which extended into the evening. In addition, the team visited the Year 5/6s for a familiarisation workshop at the end of Term 2, and a Reflection and Debrief session in the week after the project had concluded. While not all freelance artists were present for all workshops, Sue Giles the project director (also Artistic Director of Polyglot), Nathan Wilson the musician and MRPS staff member, and Lexie Wood the project manager, provided a constant presence at each of the workshops.

The children participated in a wide range of exploratory workshop activities including drama games, Big Draw, costume making with paper and masking tape, animation and musical composition. The idea of transition, from primary to secondary school was an underlying principle but specific themes to be explored ultimately emerged from the children in dialogue and creative collaboration with the artists.



“I really enjoy it because they do fun activities and they teach kids to bond with each other. For instance, the cat and mouse game we played today-making people go to each other and like, bond. Yeah like boys and girls”

- C. Year 5/6 student, interview

Key themes which emerged during the workshop period included, secret worlds (what lies beneath); individual identity, who am I; emerging identities. The cocoon became a central image for the work and the metaphor upon which the final film/live action performance was built. The children were involved in the making of a short film in which they both conceived of the scenes and composed and performed the musical score. In the final performance event, the showing of the film was accompanied by live action scenes including a powerful concluding moment in which the children burst through a ‘wall’ that they had created and designed with their own artwork. The community performance was hosted by the children, who made announcements, gave a series of speeches and provided acrobatic interludes. In addition, artwork and costumes created by children during the Polyglot workshops were on display for parents and community members to view before and after the performance. Frankston Arts Centre exhibited the film of *Altogether* at Cube 37 – *Art After Dark* from 18 September to 1 October 2017.

## Participants

### Polyglot Artists, Production staff

#### Sue Giles (Director)

Sue was appointed as the Artistic Director/co-CEO of Polyglot Theatre in 2000, leading the company into new territory with participatory works, community process and inclusion of play in the company’s theatrical offerings for children. She has directed, written or devised numerous works which have toured nationally and internationally, including for the International Arts Festivals of Perth, Sydney, Darwin and Melbourne, Singapore Arts Festival, National Theatre of Korea, Hong Kong International Arts Carnival, winner Excellent Production Award at Shanghai International Children’s Theatre Festival, UNIMA International puppetry festival in Perth and ASSITEJ International congress in Adelaide and Warsaw, Poland.

Her conceptual work *We Built This City* has toured continually since 2001 including to Kennedy Center Washington, National Theatre London and through the UK, Asia and the USA. Subsequent interactive works *Tangle*, *Sticky Maze*, *Paper Planet* and *Ants* have enjoyed similar national and global success.

In 2003, she was the Australian representative at the International Director’s Forum hosted by ASSITEJ Germany. She has been the Victorian Representative on the National Board of YPAA, and is the International Representative board member of YPAA and on the Executive Committee of ASSITEJ International.

### **Lexie Wood (Project Manager)**

Lexie has over 20 years' experience working in mainstream and independent productions, festivals and events. Lexie previously worked at Arts House, alongside the creative and technical teams, on a varied program of events including Dance Massive, the Going Nowhere festival, working with the Black Arm Band on a remote area tour to Broome and Fitzroy Crossing, presenting the Italian company Dewey Dell, as well as working with local artists The Suitcase Royale, Post and Antony Hamilton and many more.

Other roles have included Production Coordinator on the Commonwealth Games Cultural Festival, Stage Manager for the Melbourne Festival, and regular collaborations with Melbourne-based independent theatre company Vicious Fish Theatre.

Lexie began working with Polyglot Theatre in 2015 as Project Coordinator on *Outside In*, a residency at Annunciation Primary School in Brooklyn. Her current role as the Project Manager, *Voice Lab* will see Lexie working with the Frankston North community over two years, implementing this project as an early intervention tool for children. Lexie recently graduated from Deakin University with a postgraduate certificate of Arts and Cultural Management.

### **Nick Barlow (Freelance artist)**

Nick has worked extensively as a puppeteer, performer, designer and animator. After graduating with a Bachelor of Visual and Performing Arts (VCA) in 2001, Nick began work at Polyglot Theatre as an usher and envelope stuffer. He has since designed and performed for many Polyglot shows including *Tangle*, *Paper Planet*, *Ants*, *How High the Sky*, *Voice Lab*, *City of Riddles* and *Sticky Maze*. During this time he has also worked on three art projects at Mahogany Rise Primary School as a designer, animator and workshop leader.

In addition Nick has performed and/or designed for Snuff Puppets, Circus Oz, Arena Theatre, St Martins Youth Theatre, Peepshow Inc and was head puppeteer of Joey for the Australian tour of the National Theatre of Great Britain's *War Horse*.

In 2016 Nick toured North America as a puppeteer and physical performer with the Cirque Du Soleil show *Toruk*. Most recently Nick performed and designed costumes for *Only a Year* at the Melbourne Fringe Festival.

### **Sylvie Meltzer (Freelance artist)**

Sylvie Meltzer is a teaching artist with a particular focus on student-led and devised theatre, community theatre, visual arts, filmmaking and photography. She has spent the past decade working with children and adults using the Arts to create performances, exhibitions and workshops that foster relevant and meaningful conversations to be taken out into everyday life. Sylvie spent 8 years living and working for Hua Mao International School in Ningbo, China where she built an Art and Drama Curriculum for their specialised Bilingual Program, developed teacher training models and workshops, designed large scale performances with hundreds of students and coordinated a variety of school and community based theatre, art and film projects within Hua Mao and the outside community. Since relocating back to Melbourne in 2015 she has worked in all kinds of different roles – from teaching Drama in Bacchus Marsh to being part of the amazing Polyglot Theatre Company for various projects.

Passionate about collaboration, Sylvie believes in organic entertainment and learning, which ultimately comes from helping and nurturing people to 'get up and have a go'.

### Jason Heller (Film maker)

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, 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 PS in Frankston North working in video-making with Year 5/6s.

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.

### Nathan Wilson (Musician)

Wilson has been playing music for over 16 years and performs in various acts around Australia on drums, guitar and banjo. Outside of performing, Wilson has been working at Mahogany Rise Primary School for 5 years in varying roles from classroom aide to behaviour management worker. His current role as the music and drama teacher has enabled him to implement new creative arts programs and is also coordinating extra-curricular programs with Project C. Project C is a community focused initiative that aims to join the hands of young people from Frankston North with professionals in the creative industry.



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

# Mahogany Rise Primary School

## Staff

The Year 5/6 teacher, Charlotte Hewson was the key Mahogany Rise staff member involved in this year's residency. Charlotte has taught at Mahogany Rise for 3 years, and this was her first year in the Year 5/6 composite classroom. She had taught this group of children in previous years, so her relationship with them was well established, as was her understanding of their learning and socio-emotional needs. Charlotte is assisted in the classroom with a number of workers, in particular a full time Education Support worker. These staff members became involved with the Polyglot program in varying degrees, through their support of individual students and the classroom teacher.

The ES worker initially assigned to the Year 5/6 classroom found the Polyglot project very difficult – she found the chaos of the classroom confusing and could not see what the purpose of the activities could possibly be. She did note that the children were very engaged and enjoying the work, but found it 'boring' to be in the classroom during the Polyglot workshops. For a variety of unrelated reasons this ES worker moved to another class and was replaced by another ES worker. At the community performance event, this first ES worker gave the students a standing ovation, and expressed her appreciation and admiration for the Polyglot program. In a post-performance interview she acknowledged her confusion with the workshop process and her dramatic change of opinion about the work. She was tremendously proud of the children and their poise, leadership and creativity. She indicated that her difficulty initially was understanding where the process was leading – she needed to see 'the whole'.

**"With Polyglot if you don't go with the flow you kind of drown. It's like surfing."**

**- Sue Giles, post show speech**

## Students

The class of 27 students comprised half Year 5 and half Year 6 students, of mixed ability. The gender balance was strongly skewed to girls, with only seven boys in the class. While a precedent had been set in previous years for the involvement of former Mahogany Rise students, now Year 7 or 8 students from Monterey Secondary College, in the project this was not possible in 2017.

# Evaluation

## Project aims

Creative Knowledge Collaborations was engaged to complete the evaluation of the 2017 Polyglot residency at Mahogany Rise Primary School. The purpose of this evaluation was to establish the effectiveness of the project in terms of meeting the project aims. These aims were determined by Polyglot prior to the commencement of the project and are in line with the longitudinal goals that Polyglot and Mahogany Rise PS have been pursuing together over the last seven years of the partnership. The aims are as follows:

- A. Child-focused aims. To establish the effectiveness of the partnership in terms of meeting the project aims for the child participants. Working with children with limited exposure to the arts to:
  - Improve children's socio-emotional skills,
  - Increase children's engagement and success at school,
  - Develop children's confidence in their creativity and abilities,
  - Improve children's social cohesion/inclusion,
  - Increase community awareness of kids' creative capacities and the effectiveness of an arts project in schools.
- B. Partnership-focused aims. To establish the effectiveness of the partnership in terms of meeting the project aims for the key stakeholders of artists and teaching staff. The project aims to
  - Enable staff to think beyond their usual practice,
  - Grow the artists' creative practice and understanding as a result of working with kids,
  - Enable children, artists and teachers to work together in a mutual and respectful way to create something new.

## Methodology

This evaluation is oriented towards an ethnographic methodology. It has employed a range of qualitative tools – observation, interview, document analysis, arts-based responses – alongside quantitative tools – questionnaires - in order to better understand the lived experience of participants and the tangible evidence of outcomes and impacts. An evaluation framework<sup>6</sup> has been developed to guide in the analysis of data. The framework considers the key project aims against a set of key indicators (see below) overlaid with the two-fold orientation of the project – towards the participants (the children) and the key partnership stakeholders (Polyglot and MR staff).

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<sup>6</sup> This evaluation framework has been adapted from a framework employed in earlier evaluations (Sourced from Effective Change Pty Ltd.).

## Data sources

Using an ethnographic approach the evaluation considers the following data:

- Document analysis including weekly project reports and funding applications, Polyglot Strategic Plan.
- Field notes collected by the Evaluator throughout residency (attendance at workshops, planning meetings, briefings with principal) and at the final performance (including vox pop interviews with audience members.)
- Videos and photos taken by the Evaluator and artists throughout the residency.
- Two questionnaires conducted with the Year 5/6 class – in the first week of the residency to establish attitudes towards school and the arts, and in the week following the conclusion of the residency to revisit attitudes to school and the arts, and also to gather responses to the project and performance event.
- Written and creative work generated by students of Year 5/6 students during the project.
- Interviews with key informants including the Artistic Director, Polyglot artists and production staff, School Principal, Year 5/6 teacher, Community Liaison Worker, selected Year 5/6 students (volunteers).



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

# Analytical Framework

## A. Child Focused Aims

| Project Aims  | Evaluation Indicators: Children<br>Evidence of children...  | Evaluation Indicators: Organisation<br>Evidence of the Polyglot team...  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>1. Improve children's socio-emotional skills</b>   | <p>Demonstrating socio-emotional skills through the project.</p> <p><i>eg. Working independently, taking initiatives, creative risk taking, resilience in the face of failure or unexpected events, optimism, willingness to sustain engagement in new or difficult tasks, building new relationships.</i></p>  | <p>Providing opportunities for independent and group creative work.</p> <p>Generating safe space for creative risk-taking and engagement in new/difficult tasks.</p> <p><i>eg. Artist support for individuals and groups; mentoring of individuals. Generating opportunities for dialogue with participants over suitability and impact of activities/tasks.</i></p> |
| <b>2. Increase children's engagement and success at school</b>  | <p>Actively engaging in the project.</p> <p><i>eg. participating in activities, initiating of new activities.</i></p> <p>Displaying engaged behaviours and greater success in school activities beyond Polyglot project.</p> <p><i>eg. Maths, Literacy, extra-curricular.</i></p>   | <p>Engaging in dialogue with school staff (esp classroom teacher and ES workers) to support children beyond the project.</p> <p><i>eg. Taking up of activities introduced in project in other areas of curriculum or school life.</i></p> <p>Scaffolding the creation of a performance outcome which provides opportunities for engagement by all students.</p>      |
| <b>3. Develop children's confidence in their creativity and abilities</b>   | <p>Demonstrating sustained engagement with creative tasks.</p> <p>Undertaking creative tasks collaboratively.</p> <p>Initiating and completing creative tasks.</p> <p>Seeking out expression of their creativity in the project, identify it and pursue it to outcome:</p> <p><i>eg. Performance, design, technical support, musical composition.</i></p> | <p>Implementing a child-led creative process, providing and supporting diverse range of opportunities for creativity and development of new skills and abilities.</p>  |
| <b>4. Improve children's social cohesion/inclusion</b>  | <p>Demonstrating increased capacity for collaboration and teamwork.</p> <p>Inclusion of formerly isolated children in group activities.</p>   | <p>Monitoring social cohesion of group and implementing strategies to enhance cohesion.</p> <p>Addressing issues of exclusion and implementing strategies to enhance cohesion for excluded groups or individuals.</p>  |
| <b>5. Increase community awareness of kids' creative capacities and the effectiveness of an arts project in schools</b> | <p>Evidence of:</p> <p>School community (including families) attendance and response to performance and children's artwork.</p> <p>Engagement with project through information-sharing events.</p>  | <p>Leading the creation of performance outcome which provides opportunities for engagement by all students and demonstrates diverse range of creative capacities amongst student group.</p>  |

## B. Organisation focused aims

| Project Aims   | Evaluation Indicators: Organisation (Polyglot staff)<br><i>Evidence of the Polyglot team:</i>   |
|--|---|
| 6. Enable staff to think beyond their usual practice   | A <b>collaborative project</b> which is designed to work across artforms, ie multi-arts collaborations.   |
| 7. Grow the artists' creative practice and understanding as a result of working with kids                        | <b>Artistic reflective practice</b> with processes in place for artists to reflect in action and on action; and design and implement practices in response to reflection.   |
| 8. Enable children, artists and teachers to work together in a mutual and respectful way to create something new | <b>Project brief</b> allowing for authentic collaborations between key stakeholders.<br><b>Creation</b> of new original work which is child-led, created and performed by children in active collaboration with all project team. |

## Key Findings

### Overview

The 2017 Polyglot residency was a highly successful collaboration between the theatre company and the primary school. All key project aims were achieved. In addition to the achievement of all key project aims, the residency clearly demonstrated that the long term relationship between Polyglot and the school community not only contributed to a more smoothly run project with more effective communications between key stakeholders, but was a factor in incremental change within the school community, with respect to the place of creativity and cultural pursuits within the school.

Further, the evaluation revealed an unexpected outcome that may have lasting significance for the children and the school culture. This relates to a possible link between the immersion in a high quality, challenging and child-led arts project and the development of 'general capabilities' as identified by ACARA<sup>7</sup>. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008) proposes that young people be supported in becoming 'successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens' through the acquisition of a set of general capabilities. Of the seven general capabilities included in the Australian Curriculum – *Literacy, Numeracy, Information and communication technology (ICT) capability, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Ethical understanding, and Intercultural understanding* - many of the students participating in this year's Polyglot program demonstrated evidence of improvements in *Critical and creative thinking, and Personal and social capability*, with potential impacts also on *Literacy and Numeracy* (these latter were not measured in this evaluation).

<sup>7</sup>ACARA – Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority  
<http://v7-5.australiancurriculum.edu.au/generalcapabilities/overview/general-capabilities-in-the-australian-curriculum>



“I think it’s definitely shown that they’re now willing to have a go, even if it’s not right. Even down to their writing and their maths. Before they’ve just gone ‘too difficult, can’t do it’ and they’ll push it to one side. Now they will sit and they will look and they will go ‘hmm, I’m not sure’ and they’re willing to ask each other for peer help. They’ll ask questions more frequently. So it’s been really nice for them to go ‘well this is not what I was expecting but I can do it’. So it does give them their own personal belief that it’s tricky to start with but it’s achievable.”

-Charlotte Hewson, Year 5/6 teacher, Interview

The Melbourne Declaration further ‘describes individuals who can manage their own wellbeing, relate well to others, make informed decisions about their lives, become citizens who behave with ethical integrity, relate to and communicate across cultures, work for the common good and act with responsibility at local, regional and global levels’<sup>8</sup>. These same aspirations are articulated in Polyglot’s Manifesto. While it is not in Polyglot’s remit to address curriculum concerns in this residency, it should be noted that *Altogether* made an important contribution to the lives of the children of Year 5/6 and to their capacity to become successful learners, and confident and creative individuals.

## A brief word on Workshop Structure

There were six key stages in the Polyglot residency at Mahogany Rise. While these are identified separately, there was some overlap in these stages due to the organic nature of the Polyglot approach.

These six stages were:

1. **Briefing** – preliminary discussions with the school (Principal and classroom teacher) prior to the commencement of Term 3 workshops with the children. Polyglot undertook an orientation workshop with the children in Term 2 which could be considered as part of the briefing process.
2. **Relationship building** – an emphasis on getting to know the children and inviting them to get to know the Polyglot team. This phase was critical to the building of trust between the adult and child collaborators, to setting the tone for working (fun and open), and for allowing the Polyglot team to understand what interested and engaged the Year 5/6 students.
3. **Creative incubation** – characterised by a profusion of art-making opportunities and drama games. This stage introduced children to a diverse range of art-making ideas and skills and through the provision of an open and safe workshop space, invited them to explore and ‘incubate’ creative ideas which expressed something about who they were individually and collectively.
4. **Translation and realisation** – making the work – providing a synthesis of the explorations, finding artistic form to frame the ideas and creative work of the children. A fusion of artists as leaders and participants stepping into leadership.

<sup>8</sup> MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) (2008). *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Curriculum Corporation, Melbourne.

5. **Performance Event** – the crystallisation of creative thought and art-making. While the final event is by *no means* the sum total of the creative enterprise undertaken during the workshops, it provides the moment of transition, where the ownership of the work is publically claimed by the participants and acknowledged as such by the community.
6. **Celebration and Reflection** – an opportunity for individual and group consolidation of the residency experience – for the children and Polyglot team. This stage encourages all participants (children, staff and Polyglot) to articulate the particularity of their experience while also celebrating the shared experience of the project.

Each of these stages of the residency provides evidence of the impact of the project on the participants, while also offering insight into how this impact was achieved. The early stages of the project can be seen to establish the conditions which make both the outcomes and the impacts on the Grade 5/6 students and the school community possible.

The following is a discussion of key findings. These findings emerged at various stages of the project and are linked directly to the project aims and key indicators described in the Methodology section.



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

# Discussion of Key Findings

## Key Finding

1. The composition of the Polyglot team of several experienced artists from diverse backgrounds provided the necessary pre-conditions for the achievement of an artistically rich, multi-art, child-led creative project which supported positive outcomes for both children and artists.

The Polyglot team comprised a selection of highly skilled artists and facilitators. They represented a range of experience and artistic practices, providing a diversity of experiences for the children to engage with. This was a key strategy in offering the children multiple entry points into the arts experience. They were invited to explore different mediums and different practices, to sample and select according to their interests and curiosity.

This opportunity extended to the practical and technical aspects of the project, with several children becoming highly engaged in the operational and technical elements of theatre and film-making: lighting and sound, special effects, stage management. The ongoing presence of the Project Manager, Lexie and the inclusion of Jason as filmmaker, provided role models for these more operational and technical aspects of performance making.

“Nick: someone can have an interest, or specialty or skill in an area and just do that and excel in that little task and bring that to the table. [Sylvie: or try it and move on] Someone else meanwhile is doing something they’re particularly interested in and bring that, which is obviously how we work as artists. “

**-Polyglot artists, Interview**

The artists noted the value of working in a team environment, observing that they felt greater freedom to explore and play alongside the children as collaborators because they were not solely responsible for the project or delivering outcomes (although this responsibility was carried very much by the director). They also noted the opportunity that this afforded children to choose who they wanted to work with, and allowed for shared responsibility for the arts experiences that the children were able to engage with.

“I get excited and happy because we get to do something fun and create stuff and learn new things that we’ve never created.”

**-E. Year 5/6 student**

“You look across the room and suddenly something’s been made or created and you go ‘wow’. Inspiring. You don’t have to come with a lot of ideas, you just come with a starting point, and then they just take it and run with it.”

**-Nick Barlow, Polyglot artist**

## Key Finding

2. Mahogany Rise Primary School and Polyglot were able to enter the 2017 project with trust and mutual respect based on the previous years of working together.

This project demonstrated that a ‘shorthand’ between key stakeholders had been established through the long-term working relationship, built on a shared understanding that the project would be child-led, would emphasise creative processes while producing a final outcome for the school community, that Polyglot would support and respect existing school procedures and practices and that the Principal would accommodate Polyglot through flexibility with scheduling and support of the classroom teacher and ES workers placed in the classroom.

John: "What fabulous work has taken place over the last 7 or 8 weeks and this is the result of that creative process. Sometimes it's difficult to explain at the beginning of the processes what will eventuate at the end. But after doing this ...this is our seventh year, sixth or seventh year (but who's counting)... I say to people, it'll start out with a process and it'll end up with an outcome. So what happens is this is the result of this process with this group of students so every year it's very different."

**-Principal, Performance night speech**

## Key Finding

3. The building of relationships and the creation of a ‘safe space’ were fundamental building blocks to the successful outcomes of this project.

The signalling of trust, generosity and openness to the children, many of whom had experienced trauma and had experienced social and economic disadvantage in their lives, created a warm and playful atmosphere throughout the project, and opened the door to taking risks, addressing fear of failure, and tolerating the unexpected and the unknown – in other words, building resilience. One of the most significant characteristics of the residency experience for the children was that it was ‘fun’. In interviews, questionnaires and reflective writing, the children described the experience of working with Polyglot as ‘fun’ and commented on how working with the Polyglot

team made them ‘happy’. These factors cannot be underestimated in importance in generating the safe workshop space in which artistry, creative risk taking and teamwork became possible.

The tone during workshop sessions was light hearted, playful and respectful. Conversation took place during activities and games and sometimes superseded planned activities. At times, the Polyglot team worked together with the whole group, allowing children to gravitate towards individual team members; and at other times, the class was divided into smaller groups so that artists had the opportunity to build rapport with individual children.

In the creative process of a Polyglot workshop the (child) participant is placed in the position of expert as much as the (adult) workshop facilitator, through a deliberate attitude on the adult's part of respect and interest, active listening and analysis and with an eye out for the fascinating idea, inspirational squiggle or inventive offer.

**-Polyglot Theatre – Our process with kids**

## Key Finding

4. A culture of 'Yes' and 'freedom to choose' contributed to the agency of the children within and beyond the Polyglot workshops.

"There's so many adults with such an energy. Getting them to realise that nothing's a wrong decision. Everyone needs to make mistakes. Mistakes can help you create further. And it's been really nice that the children have been in an atmosphere where they're not being judged, they're just being creative and it doesn't matter how far... out of the box you are, it's perfect."

**-Charlotte Hewson, Year 5/6 teacher**

The openness of the workshop structure and diverse opportunities for individuals to explore activities that were of interest to them was supported by a culture of 'yes' propagated by the Polyglot team and by the classroom teacher and principal. The affirmative responses the children received to their ideas and suggestions allowed them to extend their creativity, imagination and/or art-making. It was the culture of 'yes' that saw them move beyond their known experiences into new territories of exploration, as the usual barriers of fear of uncertainty or failure, negative judgement, or unfamiliarity with possibilities were not present in the safe workshop space.

Children were also able to choose not to participate in a particular activity if they were uncomfortable with it or disinclined towards it. On occasion, children took up this option, entering into an activity at a level of engagement of their choosing and in their timeframe. This flexibility saw children stand aside initially and gradually move into an activity. For children who had experienced high levels of uncertainty and disruption in their lives, this freedom gave them a degree of control in an unfamiliar environment. It should also be noted that some children who chose to stay on the sidelines of an activity were not disengaged, but rather, were deeply immersed from a position that was safe for them.

"I'm going to be horrible at making the costume.  
Cause I just drew one and it was horrible."

**-Year 5/6 student, Interview**

## Key Finding

5. The children demonstrated burgeoning confidence and agency as the Polyglot workshops progressed, demonstrating an increase in their socio-emotional capacities and the impact of a longer term residency.

The capacity of the children to negotiate ideas as currency, to be accepted or passed over, without feeling threatened or undermined revealed an increase in resilience and emotional maturity.

Not only was an increase in socio-emotional qualities in evidence during the workshop phase, but it was clearly demonstrated by all of the children in the final week of the project, including at the community performance. During this week children took initiatives in the artistic and logistic realm. Children assisted in the set up of the pop-up black box stage, prepared the screen through which the whole group were to break through as the finale of the show and set up the exhibition of costumes with Polyglot artist Nick, and decorated the foyer area of the hall, volunteered to take on tech roles and front of house roles, and expressed a willingness to make speeches as part of the proceedings. In almost all instances, these were tasks that the children had never performed before, and were in addition to their performance roles, which they were also taking on for the first time.

“...what I’ve learned, this time especially is that these young people have an incredible capacity to really try something new, to really challenge where they’re thinking, to see that something they’re doing may not be working but they go in anyway to support other people. These young people have supported everybody’s ideas really strongly and in a lot of ways that’s even better than supporting each other as friends because not everyone can be friends in a room of 27 people.”

-Sue Giles, Post performance speech

## Key Finding

6. The Polyglot process of transforming workshop ideas into live or filmed performance outcomes contributed significantly to the achievement of four of the five project aims: Improve children's socio-emotional skills; Increase children's engagement and success at school; Develop children's confidence in their creativity and abilities; Improve children's social cohesion/inclusion.

While the performance event highlighted the artistic achievement of the children's artmaking collaboration with Polyglot, the film/live theatre community celebration also provided compelling evidence of the increased personal growth and agency of the Year 5/6 as school leaders and confident and generous young people.

The evaluation identified several factors which explain this:

- a) Exploration and skills. The open-endedness of the exploratory workshops was complemented by the acquisition of new skills in the transformational phase – costume making which required attention to detail and pattern making skills; musical composition using musical instruments and recording equipment; persistence and repetition, even in the face of failure; the acquisition of theatre vocabulary – children were introduced to concepts of staging and stage craft through the use of a 'black box' pop-up structure set up in their hall, complete with lighting, colour gels and a smoke machine. They were also introduced to the vocabulary of 'doing' – once the black box was in place, children had experiences of performing and being an audience in front of their peers and were then able to participate in a discourse using the language of performance.
- b) Team work. Children who had previously worked *alongside* others became collaborators *with* others, both artists and peers. Learning how to be team players, to contribute to teamwork was the skill that most children identified as one of their most significant achievements in this project. Working towards an outcome, either filming a scene or preparing for the performance, was central to this learning.
- c) Finding something for everyone. While Year 5/6 H presented less challenges relating to behaviours, emotional maturity and capacity, than some previous groups Polyglot had worked with, the Polyglot team identified the need to provide a point of entry into the project for every child in the class. The transformational phase of the work allowed for further points of entry for children who were perceived as not fully engaging in the exploratory workshops. In the weekly post-workshop debriefs the Polyglot team considered each child individually and identified at least 1 - 2 activities that each could contribute to the film/live performance, based on their expressed areas of interest. The value of having a larger team offering different activities and support for student interests was very apparent in this phase.

- d) Visit to Monterey SC. The creation of the film incorporated a class visit to Monterey SC where a key cocoon scene was filmed. The visit to the secondary school consolidated the transition theme underpinning *Altogether*, with the powerful metaphor of the Mahogany Rise performers emerging from cocoons in the courtyard at Monterey.
- e) Performance event. On Friday 15 Sept, the project culminated in the school hall with a public showing of the film that was composed of scenes filmed over the preceding weeks, complemented by live action sequence and live and recorded music. At the culmination of the live performance, all of the children broke through a shadow screen onto a stage lined in bubble wrap. The children took charge of the event. A number of children took on responsibilities as ushers. Several of the children prepared speeches and additional entertainment to include in the proceedings, one student volunteered to be MC for the event and two children took on responsibilities for technical production such as lighting, sound and the smoke machine. The post-project questionnaire completed by the class revealed the significance of the performance event to the children. Many remarked on the excitement and pride they had in their contribution to the film or the live performance or to their own particular initiatives (ushering, giving a speech, performing acrobatics).

“Over the past few weeks that Polyglot have been here, it’s been really fun! Building costume, cocoons and the stage and planes made from paper, backgrounds and setting up technology for the recordings and for the big show, having fun along the way. I expect the audience will love the show...”

**-E. Year 5/6 student,  
Written Reflective task**

Q.4 One thing from film/show you are proud of?

A. I was proud of making the mini black box

Q.4 One thing from film/show you are proud of?

A. Using the smoke machine

Q.4 One thing from film/show you are proud of?

A. Spray painting on paper

Q.4 One thing from film/show you are proud of?

A. The gymnastics, cocoon, film

Q.4 One thing from film/show you are proud of?

A. The speech I made

Q.4 One thing from film/show you are proud of?

A. Not having stage fright

Q.4 One thing from film/show you are proud of?

A. Being an usha and my caterpillar scene



## Key Finding

7. The performance event increased the community's awareness of the creative and leadership attributes of the children.

The audience of approximately 100 comprised many parents and family members, teachers and members of the school community (Educational Support workers, psychologists and allied health and community workers), Polyglot staff and other key community and funding stakeholders.

The atmosphere was celebratory and there was a palpable sense of occasion. The audience of parents, siblings, friends and staff appeared to appreciate the post-performance speeches and acrobatics equally – perhaps recognising that their Year 5/6 children were school leaders throughout this event. The refreshments in the school kitchen were similarly an important part of the whole community event.

Q.4 One thing from film/show you are proud of?  
A. the gymnastic show after mr culleys speech

Of those children who completed the question relating to family attendance in the post-performance questionnaire (22), all but one indicated that family members had attended the performance, ranging from one parent to several multigenerational members of extended families. The children reported that family members responded very positively to the event, in particular, to seeing their child taking on a role within the event, and expressing recognition and appreciation for the artistic dimensions of the performance.

The performance event was pivotal to the community engagement aspect of the project. The project focused on the Year 5/6 class and did not require the involvement of parents or family members along the way. However, the awareness of Polyglot as a rich and exciting part of a Mahogany Rise student's life has permeated families through sibling and extended family connections. Many attending the community performance of *Altogether* had attended previous Polyglot events, or had participated in them.

They said it was amazing and there wasn't scrappy food. It was actually amazing. (That was my Mum)

My Mum said that the show was great and she can't wait to show my family. My sister watched it and she liked the bit that was the cocoons

My family said it was good and different than they were thinking

Yes, they loved it. They were surprised by the music

## Major Challenges

In order to fully understand the nature and dimensions of impact, it is useful to consider the limitations of the project, to identify difficulties and challenges encountered by the children, artists and school community during the implementation and execution of the project.

### Equitable Inclusion

#### Key Finding

8. Due to the unfamiliar and unstructured nature of many of the workshop activities, many children had to overcome significant fears in order to fully participate in the project, including fear of failure and of the unknown.

One of the ongoing tensions experienced in the project was the difficulty in drawing all of the children into an active and committed participation in the project. Throughout the project, the Polyglot team devoted their considerable energies and ingenuity to engaging all members of the class in activities, with mixed success. There was a small cohort of boys (7) in the class and members of this group provided one of the biggest challenges for the team. The following characteristics emerged during the project and indicate possible reasons for reticence to engage:

*Orientation to Art/s:* The initial questionnaire revealed that most of these boys preferred sport to other school activities including art (although some did reveal considerable abilities in costume making, design and drawing through the project). The classroom teacher suggested that for some of these boys, doing the arts was not considered 'manly'.

*Vulnerability and Fear of failure:* The Polyglot team invited the participants to engage with the workshops in a playful, joyful or 'foolish' way. Many children were reluctant to appear 'foolish' or vulnerable, or to do something 'wrong' and this resulted in them holding back. Over time, as trust and personal relationships were built in the class, this resistance to engaging more fully diminished.

*Security and an absence of structure:* The Polyglot project represented the unknown to the children and invited them to commit to activities which may have appeared random, unstructured and chaotic.

Many of the students in the class had experienced considerable uncertainty and insecurity in their lives. The Principal observed that many children in Year 5/6 had encountered trauma in their lives and the school responded to this circumstance by providing a structured, predictable and safe school environment. A lack of guidance and structure made some students uncertain and they were reluctant to risk 'failure'. For these children, an initial response to the unpredictability and apparent chaos of the child-led Polyglot project was to hold back as a protective mechanism.

"They don't believe in their imagination abilities. Getting them to engage and think outside the box was going to be one of their biggest challenges, because they're so used to having everything explicitly taught to them directly.

To have an outsider come in and say, 'make me something' you could see them go 'whoa' but they've overcome that fear...Fear of the unknown - not having a quantifiable direction as to what was expected."

**Charlotte Hewson, Year 5/6 teacher**

The disparity in levels of commitment was a source of ongoing concern and vigilance for the Polyglot team, in line with their project aims. This issue was a regular issue for review in their weekly debriefs.

## Primary – Secondary school partnership

In 2017, the partnership between the Mahogany Rise and Monterey Secondary College was less in evidence, although it was a nominated goal of the residency to involve the secondary college and students as collaborators in the project, as had been the practice in previous years. It appears that there were a number of reasons for this situation in 2017 and most of them were logistic in nature. Firstly, there was no opportunity in 2017 for Polyglot workshops to take place at Monterey as they had in previous years, due to major building works at the secondary college. In addition, there did not appear to be a clearly identifiable gatekeeper at Monterey to broker the involvement of secondary students in the Polyglot project in 2017. A third factor that was particular to 2017 was that approximately half of the participants were in Year 5. With transition to high school over a year away, the imperative to build a pathway to Monterey was less compelling for both children and the Polyglot team. Themes of changing identities, transformation, and stepping into new worlds – all related to transition – were embedded in the workshop process.

## Mentoring – the Legacy Initiative

Prior to the commencement of the project, it had been decided that 2017 would be the final year of Polyglot residency at Mahogany Rise. In the light of this, the Polyglot leadership team consulted with John Culley to plan for a Polyglot legacy: an ongoing creative arts program at Mahogany Rise, run by staff. Educational Support worker and musician Nathan Wilson (Wilson) has taken on leadership of this program. In 2017 he was mentored by Polyglot to assist him to transition into this role. Kids' Collaborations coordinator, Kate Kantor provided Wilson with 3 x 2 hour mentoring sessions during terms 2 and 3. This involved modelling of classroom practice, co-teaching with Wilson in the creative arts program, advice as to planning, implementation of strategies and useful resources.

And, as one of the team of artists in the 2017 residency, Wilson participated in face to face workshop planning and debriefing, and online interactions with the artist team. Further guidance in the area of strategic planning and artist development are to follow. (A more detailed discussion of the nature and nurturing of the Polyglot legacy is included in the Longitudinal Report.)

## Key Finding

9. The introduction of a creative arts program at Mahogany Rise in 2017 indicates cultural change at the school, and the mentoring and support for a key staff member to fulfil that role suggests capacity building is taking place within the current staff.

Key issues to emerge in the evaluation of the planning for the Polyglot legacy and the building of capacity are as follows:

*Experience in arts facilitation:* staff leading the creative arts program at the school need further experience in arts facilitation in order to effectively build a sustainable program for the future

“During the actual Polyglot program the kids wanted to play Line Tiggy so we played that, but that was snapped up right away, ‘oh that’s a beautiful image and we can do this’ and already kids are starting to think about that and I was like, how did we do that? Or how did a game the kids loved to play, which I’ve played for years and years with them, how has that suddenly become an image and an art. And it was obviously quite clear when we filmed it and we did a freeze...but I suppose I’m still trying to figure out those little games that you play, how they end up building up to be a performance and allowing the kids to dictate where they want it to go?”

**-Wilson, Mentor session 2**

*Resourcing:* The capacity of the school to attract the funds to sustain the rich arts experiences provided through a well funded, team approach is not currently within their capacity and as such is not assured. Strategies for seeking funds and in-kind resources will need to be put in place.

*Sole artist:* In contrast to the Polyglot multi-arts team approach, the new creative arts program at MR is to be led by one person. A sole artist leading a program which sits alongside the school curriculum will not have the capacity to achieve the scale and diversity of practice that Polyglot was able to bring each year. Strategies such as bringing in guest artists for specific projects or events, and continuation of the mentoring of the creative arts facilitator, are recommended.

## Recommendations and Conclusion

This report concludes with a set of recommendations which have been elicited from the findings of the 2017 Evaluation. As this was the final residency that Polyglot would undertake at Mahogany Rise, the recommendations focus on the way forward for the Polyglot – Mahogany Rise relationship, and on learnings which may be applicable to Polyglot more broadly and to their Kids' Collaborations program in particular.

### Recommendations

**Polyglot Legacy at Mahogany Rise.** It is recommended that Polyglot prioritise practical support and mentoring for the new creative arts leader at MRPS – with a focus on practical applications of arts practice and the development of strategic planning skills, particularly those related to funding of arts programs.

**Kids' Collaborations programs.** The evaluation of the 2017 residency revealed that it was the distinctive Polyglot approach to working in situ with children, employing a creative, multi-arts child-led process that was instrumental to the achievement of the overarching project aim of resilience. It is recommended that Polyglot continue to formalise this approach, through further documentation of exemplars of practice and analysis of their process, so that it can be accessible to those working in Kids' Collaborations and their creative partners. There is also further scope to disseminate aspects of this process to the wider arts community, who would benefit from learning from this emancipatory approach to working with children.

**Capacity building and succession planning.** Underpinning a number of the findings in this evaluation is the level of expertise, in artistry and facilitation, required to work effectively as an artist within a Polyglot residency. In 2017, all but one of the artists involved had worked in a Mahogany Rise residency on previous occasions, and the artist new to this site had extensive experience as a solo artist working in educational settings. As a result, there was minimal induction into the Polyglot way of working with children in 2017. It should be acknowledged that this expertise needs to be cultivated and supported and it is not always possible to work with artists who bring this level of expertise. In order to sustain and enrich this practice, it is recommended that Polyglot further develop its capacity building with respect to Kids' Collaborations artists – where possible through the development of a specific program of training in the Polyglot process. Further attention should also be given to capacity building for project leaders, in the form of mentoring and opportunities to lead.

**Development of general capabilities.** While it was not a key aim of this project to make links to curriculum, the evaluation identified significant ways in which the Polyglot project contributed to the development of several of the general capabilities that contribute to the individual's capacity as a learner. Given the broader aim of Polyglot to bring about cultural change in school environments, it is a recommendation of this report that Polyglot consider further explorations of how their approach to creative arts practice through a child-led process could take place at the heart of a school's curriculum rather than as a companion to it.

## Conclusion



Image credit: Theresa Harrison

Before Polyglot came into their classroom in July 2017, the children were asked about their attitude to ‘art’ (the arts). Almost all of them identified some kind of art activity that they enjoyed as part of their school day, but less than half did any kind of art based activity at home, or in an after school setting. When *Altogether* was almost over, the children of 5/6 H reflected on some of the discoveries they’d made about themselves and their classmates during their time ‘doing Polyglot’. Many were able to articulate powerful new understandings about their capacities as artistic individuals: ‘I’m creative’, ‘I can be imaginative’, ‘Playing the keyboard live’, and they offered thoughtful insights into their capacities as a class: ‘Talented’; ‘Weird, good, fun, creative’; ‘team work gets you further’; and, ‘Everyone can get along even if they’re not friends’. There was clear evidence in their final reflective pieces that there had been immediate and potentially lasting impacts on this group of children and that the aims of the project had been met.

However, there were some further reflections from the children in these final moments of *Altogether* that suggest that some impacts are not so easily measured, but are worthy of note. This report concludes with just two of these:

Q. Did you discover something new about yourself?

A. That I’m a good person

“My experience with Polyglot is FANTASTIC. When I first met Sue I thought ‘Well this is gonna be boring!!’ but it’s not. It’s been one of the best times of my LIFE and that has helped me be more happy than ever.”