

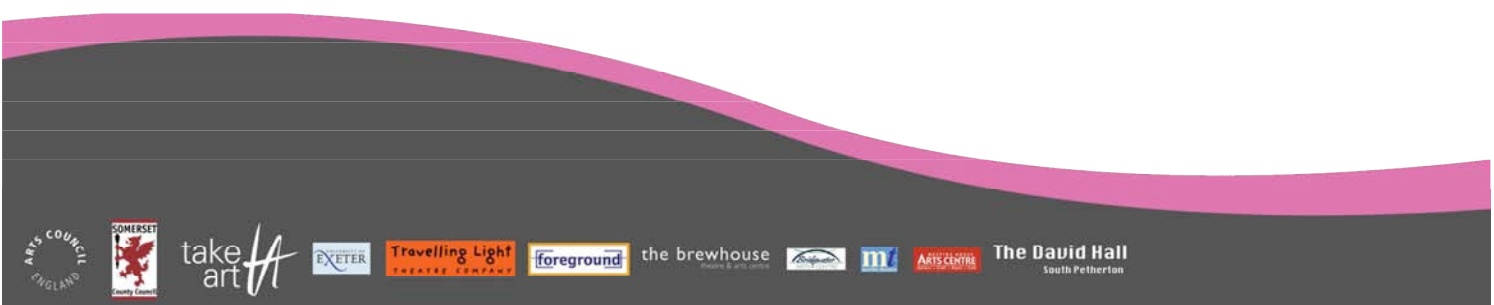


Sticky Fingers & Toes

Final Report on Somerset Thrive! Project

September 2008

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University of Exeter



Acknowledgements

With thanks to all the people who gave up time to be interviewed, gave permission for their children to be photographed or video-recorded, to the staff of Children's Centres who took part in interviews, provided information and helped with questionnaire surveys. Special thanks to the team of Travelling Light, led by Mike Akers, who gave time to contribute ideas and discuss the process.

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STICKY FINGERS & TOES: FINAL REPORT

Introduction

Sticky Finger & Toes was one of a family of projects funded by a county-wide, Arts Council England (ACE) initiative Thrive!. This initiative addresses current ACE policy and aims to develop the capacity of Somerset Arts Promoters (SAP). The Sticky Fingers & Toes project linked Somerset Arts Promoters with early years partners, and with one another. By bringing SAP partners together it aimed to expand the scope of their activity and to develop a greater coherence of approach. To counter-balance the emphasis on structure and organisation integral to Thrive!, this project was committed to centring the experiences of children and families both in practice and in its research, reported here.

According to a recent Scottish Arts Council document (2004) excellence in cultural organisations involves three elements: awareness of the learning/engagement potential of the arts practice; the development of practice in arts organisations and centres (including programming); and an understanding of the differing needs of audiences. The Sticky Fingers & Toes project was active across all these three elements. This report is in three sections, looking at each of the three elements in turn under the following headings:

- Section 1: Developing Artistic Activity
- Section 2: Developing Audiences
- Section 3: Developing Partnerships

Where

The Sticky Fingers & Toes project involved four Somerset theatre/arts centres, each of which was linked with a nearby Children's Centre:

- Taunton, the Brewhouse Theatre linked with the Acorn Children's Centre,
- Frome, the Merlin Theatre linked with the Key Children's Centre
- Bridgwater, the Bridgwater Arts Centre linked with the Victoria Park Children's Centre
- Ilminster/South Petherton, the Meeting House Arts Centre/David Hall Arts Centre linked with Ile Valley Children's Centre/Busy Bees Pre-school/South Petherton Pre-school

Taunton, Bridgwater, Frome and Ilminster are all market towns of varying size. The Countryside Agency has focussed recently on the role of market towns as 'service providers' for surrounding areas and as a focus for regenerative activity, whether this is economic, business or cultural (DEFRA, 2002). Developing capacity in market towns, that is, ensuring services, businesses and industries have skilled workforces, appropriate accommodation and good transport links is seen as an important process to regeneration. At the same time the distinctiveness of market towns and rural areas is ideally maintained by building on local identity, culture and character. A 'market town template' provided by the Countrywide Agency (CA) includes a range of cultural facilities. Interestingly, in a recent CA report, Frome is presented as a case study exemplifying a 'successful market town'.

Who

The project was initiated and managed by Gina Westbrook, Director of Start (Early Years and Families Service) for Take Art, a Somerset arts development agency. It centred a well known Bristol based Theatre In Education (TIE) company, Travelling Light, one of the country's foremost children's theatre specialists. Mike Akers is the education director for Travelling Light. It included a research strand conducted by Susan Young of the University of Exeter.

Structure

The project took place during late 2007, early 2008. At each location it consisted of:

- 2 half day workshop sessions at the Children's Centre
- 1 workshop session in the theatre/ arts centre
- Performance in the theatre/ arts centre

During the sessions, the company explored the children's responses and used them to inform their development of Shadow Play, a theatre piece for 3-5 year olds. The show was performed in February and March 2008 at the venues and then toured nationally¹.

Why

New provision for young children is being set up nationally in the creation of Children's Centres; centres which provide integrated care and education for children across a designated locality. There is increasingly a view of the wider 'ecology' of early years provision where the centre itself is just one part and home, daycare, health, play, sports and arts centres, theatres, museums and libraries all contribute. Similarly, arts organisations and centres are increasingly seeing their activity as expanding and networked within their local communities. So both children's and cultural centres have a commitment to integrated community working. However, creating bridges between the two sectors needed the impetus, structure and support provided by this project.

Method

The research was based on the principles and processes of action research. Action research includes systematically collecting, reflecting on and interpreting information in an ongoing way through the life of a project. The interpretations are fed back in to the project as it unfolds and converted in to practical action when and if appropriate. The methods for collecting data from many sources include observation field-notes, photos, video-recording, interviews and research conversations. If required, the interpretations can lead to some conclusions at the close of a project as to benefits and gains. Advantageously, such an approach enables the adjustment of work as it is happening and also aims to be inclusive of all those taking part (early years professionals, arts professionals, parents and children).

Research in this mode aims to understand, inform and improve as a formative process. It is less concerned to arrive at summative judgements about success or impact. In the current 'evidence-based' climate, there is pressure on arts organisations to adopt rational methods of research to provide so-called hard evidence of impact and outcomes. At the same time academic and theoretical activity in applied arts education research is moving to develop approaches which are process focussed, rooted in artistic activity, imagination and bodily engagement, suggesting that these processes are more meaningful in generating insight and closer to the artistic process *per se*. Academic researchers argue that questions of impact and

¹ Contact Travelling Light for details – they have a filmed version of the final show www.travlight.co.uk.

outcome necessarily raise questions about the nature and quality of the work itself and its underlying values that cannot – should not – be ignored (Biesta, 2007).

Action research in its traditional form is based on the principle of identifying problems and dilemmas and working in cyclical processes of review and forward planning in order to resolve problems or find improved ways. Some have criticised the focus on identifying problems in action research, preferring to identify positive aspects - strengths - seeing these as a constructive basis for developing good practice. Research in this mode, particularly adopted for the improvement of organisations is termed 'appreciative inquiry' or AI. Appreciative inquiry – the process of identifying the positive and envisioning what might be – is very similar to contemporary pedagogical processes for supporting children's creativity whereby observations of children reveal fruitful starting points for extending their creative activity. Since the education team of Travelling Light were knowledgeable and experienced in contemporary pedagogies, an appreciative enquiry approach fitted well with an overall project orientation.

The challenge with this project was to research the development of all three elements as outlined in the introduction:

- awareness of the learning potential of the practice [Section 1: Developing Artistic Activity];
- an understanding of the differing needs of audiences [Section 2: Developing Audiences];
- the development of practice in arts organisations and centres [Section 3: Developing Partnerships].

To increase awareness of the learning potential of practice, the methods used were observation and collection of data through field notes, photos and video clips plus some interviews with setting staff and the theatre workers. To inform an understanding of the differing needs of audiences and the development of partnerships a range of informal, semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents of children attending and the professional staff involved.

The research processes adhered to the ethical guidelines issued by the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Exeter and the regulations of the data protection act. All participants signed consent forms which affirmed anonymity and confidentiality.

Section 1: Developing Artistic Activity

Field work: observations and interviews, collection of video data for later review

Purpose

This project was premised on the principle that the children's experience should be central. So it was essential for the research to approach the project from their perspective first. All too often project design and evaluation are focussed on the top-down institutional and organisational dimensions of a project [particularly in large, networked projects such as Thrive!] and can become distanced from the direct, lived experiences of those for whom it is intended.

In early years education there are strong shifts towards seeing children as competent, independent and unique and these perspectives of childhood are enshrined in new early years documentation (Every Child Matters, Early Years Foundation Stage). This focus on children as active and agentive can conflict with the tradition of theatres and arts centres seeing audiences as passive. 'Child-centred' practice needs to be as embedded in arts centre practice as it is in early years educational practice – and this would include programming. Conventionally, the education activity and programming of theatres and arts centres are separate elements. Moreover, education activity tends to be lower status, marginal and seen as subservient to the main activity of the theatre or arts centre (PAEback, 2007).

A new imperative in education and early years provision is to equip children for futures which are likely to be characterised by change and innovation. Developing creativity through cultural and arts activity is seen as one of the answers. However, according to Holden radical action is needed now to make culture and the arts a part of everyone's – but especially every child's – experience (Holden, 2008: 13).

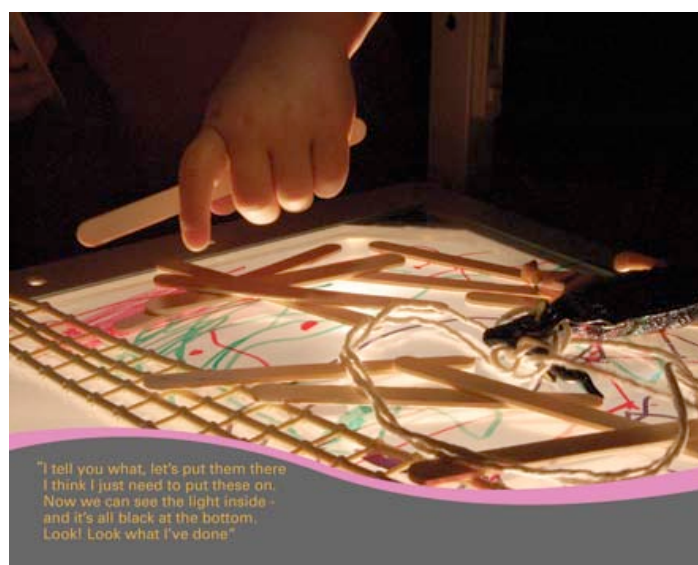
Learning and Engagement

Arts organisations are beginning to define education in a much wider sense than in the past, replacing education with more inclusive terms such as 'learning and engagement', reflected for example in the title of the 'learning and participation' coordinator for the Brewhouse Taunton. The Sage Gateshead, one of the pioneer centres for approaches to learning and engagement, identifies participation as the processes by which 'people are engaged in the art, and the art and the organisation are informed by people' (Zeserson, 2004). In similar vein, the new Children's Centres are defining their activity not as education in the narrow, institution-centred, curriculum-defined sense, nor simply as care in the case of very young children, but as centres which support young children's learning in the broadest sense. Supporting young children's learning expands to include working with families and working with groups and organisations within local communities. Thus the opportunity is ripe for the Children's Centres to connect with nearby cultural and arts centres. The Children's Centres are newly forming and evolving. As a bonus, they are flexible, often staffed by energetic and entrepreneurial staff. At the same time, they may be experiencing 'innovation overload'. Any project working with Children's Centres needs to recognise these characteristics.

While Children's Centres are still forming, there is a valuable principle to promote - for Children's Centres to become places for art rather than drawing down artistic activity to become 'curricularised' as just one more tool for delivery of a curriculum. The new 'cultural offer' adds weight to promoting this principle. In the current climate, however, with the emphasis squarely on children's learning in the basics of social skills, communication, numeracy and literacy, it's all too easy for arts projects to be drawn in to serve these curricular imperatives and to find justification in aligning their work with these emphases. In more isolated rural areas it may be particularly valuable for Children's Centres, housed often in newly built, imaginatively designed spaces to become places for art for families, supported and coordinated by market town arts centres. This project, with its outward facing structure sought to develop this interface between the two types of centre.

Work in the Early Years Settings

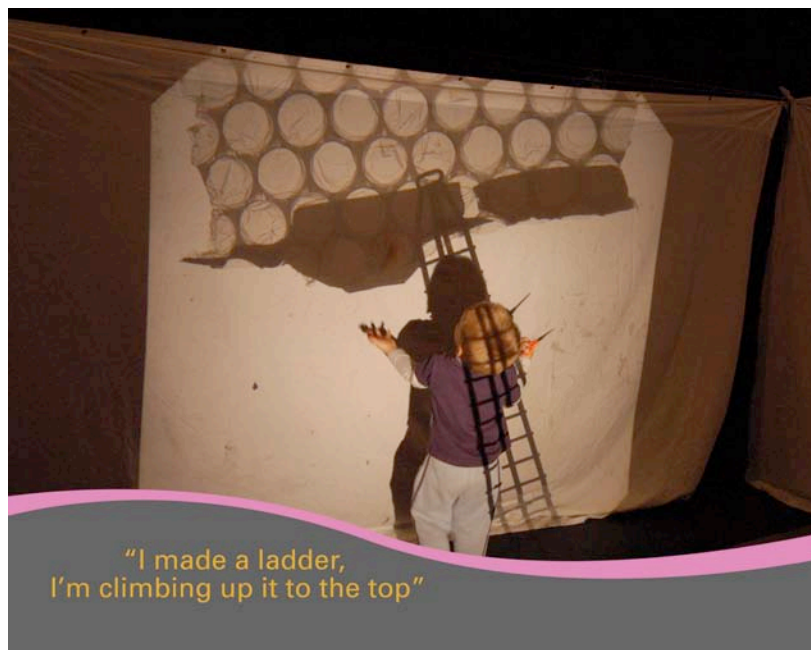
The Travelling Light team usually organised activity in the settings in two phases; an initial period of free-flow play followed by a more structured activity involving elements of story and costume. For the free-play phase, 3 overhead projectors were positioned to light up cotton-sheet screens that could be easily strung up in any room. Many small items were provided such as lolly sticks, plastic animals, scrapstore stuff together with coloured cellophane, tissue paper that could create shadow-images on the screen. Pens were also provided to enable drawn images to be projected. Thus the children were playing with the elements of theatre - light and dark, objects and characters in mini shadow plays projected at a short distance from themselves. The children could become an audience to what was happening on the screen and they were both the agents and spectators of that experience.



The value of seemingly simple materials - paper, small sticks, scrapstore stuff - is in their transformative potential; that they can become whatever you want them to be. The small animals, in turn, suggested actors in mini-role plays made up by the children. These were play environments which mostly encouraged individualised play rather than encouraging socio-dramatic play between and among the children themselves. This was perhaps useful with younger children, particularly when a high proportion of adults were present and ready to play with them.

Observation:

Jack (pseudonym) is playing with a piece of plastic scrapstore stuff which is trellised like a small ladder. He places it on the overhead projector, looks up to see its shadow on the screen. He runs across to the screen saying, 'look, look at my ladder, I'm going to climb up it'. As he says this he makes movements as if pretending to climb up the ladder.



Pedagogy

The Travelling Light team have considerable experience of participating in early years arts projects across the South West run on the pedagogical principles of the nurseries of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy. According to Reggio Emilia practice, opportunities are provided by the adult – usually materials selected for their intrinsic interest – for the children to explore and play with. Adults observe attentively and then interact with children to develop lines of interest, thinking and learning from the initiations of the children. Light boxes, (similar to overhead projectors), are a familiar resource in Reggio nurseries.

The elements of the sessions which were adult-initiated – non-verbal story-telling, making costumes, improvised drama – still contained a strong commitment to encouraging idea-giving and being responsive to the children's contributions. Thus two adults creating a costume for a third with the children sitting as semi-circular audience evolved as a lively interaction between adults and children to create the costume. When the costume was complete, the new winged, tall-hatted character performed a short 'scene' in the blue projected light from an overhead projector accompanied by lively, evocative cimbalom music. In this short, improvised theatrical event the children were absorbed and engaged as spectators. They knew it was Mike – but Mike dressed up and acting.

Thus the setting-based sessions spanned across the whole continuum of ways for children to participate, from following in adult led activity to initiating and leading. Contemporary practice in early years is emphasising this continuum and in particular the value of concentrated, sustained interaction between adults and children to develop imaginative thinking. The actor/educators as 'facilitators' worked in a range of ways that merged and blended their educator and actor skills. Their specialist, theatrical expertise was revealed in the many small, skilful, decisions

made 'on the hoof' as they played with the children or developed improvised activities with and for them. This kind of work is particularly innovative and valuable for children's creative thinking.

A particular characteristic of the Travelling Light's early years education work is the idea of non-verbal, story-telling – a kind of improvised mime using minimal props, in which simple story-elements may emerge but are not predetermined. Presented with partial story elements the children are challenged to make sense and to infer meaning imaginatively.



The artist/educators working with Travelling Light are very experienced having participated in a number of arts projects with reception and KS1 children based on broadly 'child-centred' principles, but said that they were less experienced at the preschool age phase, or at working with parents and children together. It can be easy to under-estimate the skills and knowledge required to work successfully with very young children. Experienced educators in the setting where the work was particularly successful actively bridged any gaps between what was offered and the children's ability to participate by offering prompts and supports to both adult actors and children. In an atmosphere of open collaboration and mutual respect, this give and take between educators and artists happened seamlessly.

In general the story elements of the setting activities were more positively evaluated by the setting staff than the free-play with the overhead projector and small-objects.

'I think yesterday, the first session in the hall, was just a little bit too long, for young children' (educator)

'for some of them, all they were interested in was looking at the projector, and the light, some of them didn't know it was reflected up' (educator)

'just that lovely idea of the costumes, the sticky tape – that worked incredibly well, you imagine how you could develop that in to story, language, drama work' (educator)

This, however, may be because language and story are more readily identifiable as fitting with curricular requirements. To identify the children's learning in self-initiated play often requires close observation and careful interpretation;

superficially it may look less 'productive', but when documented and analysed reveals creative thinking on the part of the children.



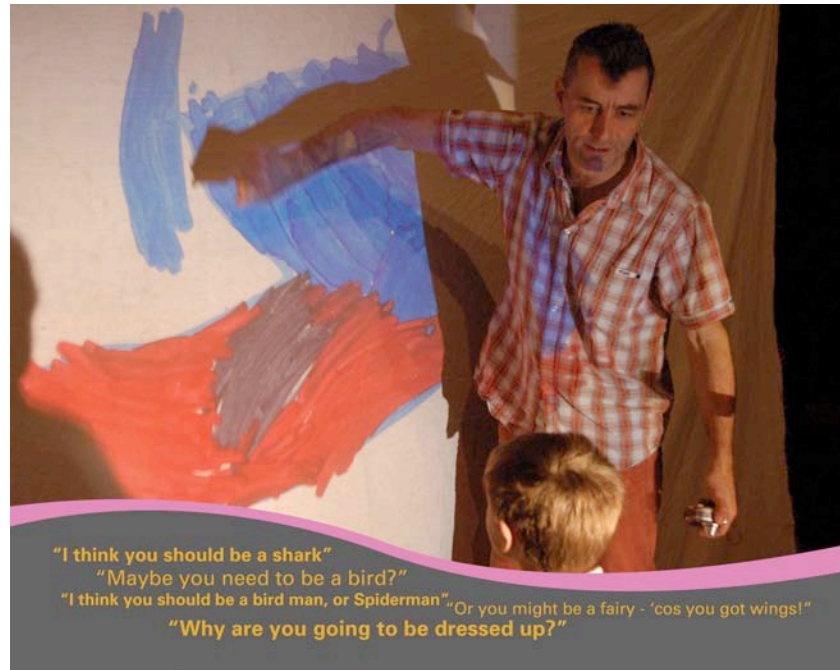
From observations and interpretations the learning value of all the activities was particularly complex and rich. Across the whole range of activities, their value was to hybridise young children's play and exploration with some theatrical constructs; the use of story, characters, costume, lighting and action on screens. Importantly, however, the learning potential depended also on organisational aspects of time, space, numbers of children and the capacity of the educators and parents to support the children's participation. All these aspects work in concert.

The Activity in the Centre

When parents are present with their children in a stay and play session or in the arts centre, the Travelling Light team had the additional dimension of working with parents and children as pairs. This required alertness to what the parents would feel comfortable with and could participate in.

Observation:

A mother and her three-year-old and a baby attending a stay and play are playing with the items on the overhead project. The mother structures the activity for her son, selecting items which may be more identifiable shadows on the screen. She picks out a plastic cow. She suggests to her son that he place the cow centrally on the projector and deftly removes a few other items that might clutter the image. She then directs him to look at it on the screen, pointing to the cow shadow. She points back and forth, watching her son closely, until she is sure he has recognised the connection between image and object. Then she moves the cow, 'let's make him walk', to strengthen and extend the relationship between object and image.



In this observation, the mother is supports her son in understanding the relationship between object and shadow, recognising this as the potential of the projector activity and is skilful in 'scaffolding' the task and directing. The baby throughout is held under one arm, watching but not directly participating. For his part, her son, I would suggest, is used to being engaged in this kind of activity with his mother – something which is intended to both interest, entertain and educate. He is probably confident, based on past experience, that she will pitch the challenge about right so that he can successfully engage.

Observation

During one session, large cardboard boxes and torches were provided. These immediately suggested hide and seek in the boxes, lighting up the dark interiors and creating obvious play roles for children as hidiers and the parents as seekers. One child is curled up inside the box and her mother, crouching just by the box is pretending she has lost her daughter 'where's C. gone? I can't find her anywhere?'



Other observations revealed pairs of parent and child who did not co-participate in activities in this way. In some instances, young children were left more to their own devices. Some were observed piling large numbers of items on to the overhead or scattering them in all directions with energetic, unregulated movements. The quantities of small objects had become the primary focus of interest rather than the secondary light and shadow effects that could be achieved. For those children who had not yet made the connection between object and shadow, structured guidance would have been helpful if they were to see the connection. Parents, and in some instances early years staff, sometimes saw their role less as 'playing with' and more as monitoring and supervising.



In new places, with new activities, there were sometimes conflicts of boundaries. In the early years settings, the setting staff were clear that they set the boundaries and where these lay. For example, in one Children's Centre, babies and young children intermingled, challenging the skills of the theatre education team in developing work with such mixed age phases. The theatre team saw it as their responsibility as visiting artists to adapt and mould to whatever context they were working in. In the theatre environments, boundaries were sometimes less clear. For example, one instance of running energetically round and round in a large open room was viewed positively as enthusiastic exuberance and a wonderful chance to physically exploit an indoor open space by some but raised anxiety 'getting out of hand' and likely to cause upset to people or things by others.

'Family Friendly'

While much emphasis has been placed recently on 'family friendly' practice in theatre spaces (ACE, 2006) this has primarily focussed on understanding how to provide for families in service, marketing and regulatory terms. It is also important to consider how the parents can be supported in participating with their children. For some parents, joining in and being a play partner to their children comes easily and feels comfortable, for others, less so, for a variety of possible reasons. While the Travelling Light team interacted with the children and skilfully modelled how to support and extend their explorations, they were faced with dilemmas about whether, and if so, how and when, to intervene to help parents and practitioners engage. In a prior project involving a theatre company working with young children and their parents, similar dilemmas about how much to suggest or direct the parents' participation also arose (Young, 2004). Research in to parent and child participatory programmes at the Tate Gallery arrived at the conclusion, from interviews and observations, that parents valued guidance in the expectations for when and how they might participate – more so than the Tate arts team had anticipated (Hancock and Cox, 2002). These kinds of issues formed the basis of informal discussions with the project team as part of the ongoing action research process.

'do you think the parents got confused because when you go to the theatre, when you go to see something, they are expecting to see a very formal show, or you know, if any people have been to the theatre, because it's very free and it looks like not much is happening, it looks like chaos – there is masses happening, there is a lot . but do you think maybe the parents aren't used to seeing what is happening, do we need to help them, explain it or something?' (educator)

There were some 'rough edges' during the first visit by a Children's Centre to a theatre that took place in the project schedule. Some practical detail of timing, numbers and accommodation created minor difficulties – mostly overcome by the Travelling Light team, but nevertheless prompting a quick review process and information shared between the theatre staff for future visits (see: Appendix 1). Learning from experience, thoughtful preparation and attention to detail paid off in subsequent visits. At one theatre, how the theatre space itself offered interest for the children (playing with lights, putting on special effects, running along seating aisles) and creating comfortable foyer area with drinks and biscuits on hand all contributed to the success of a visit.



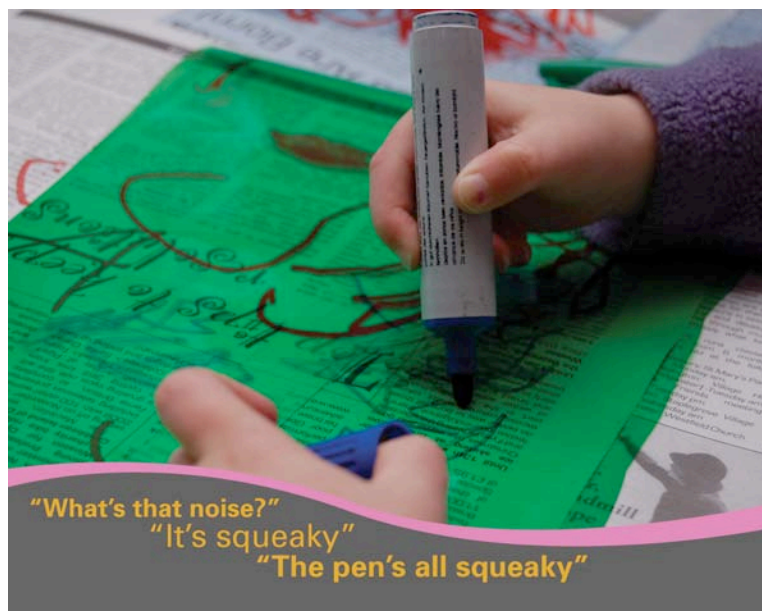
In one partnership there was concern among the educators that some activities provided by the theatre education officer for the children modelled an approach to learning that conflicted with some messages about children's learning they were working hard to promote among the parents. The cultural centre coordinator and the Children's Centre teacher have since made a very productive working partnership. However, this example demonstrates how a preliminary awareness of early years educational principles for theatre staff would be advantageous. This is not to suggest that they need to be equipped chapter and verse in early years practice – such a suggestion would be unrealistic. However they might be aware of variations in practice style [strong adherence to child-initiated play, or more formal, adult-structured models], aware that settings can identify strongly with 'their style', often encapsulated in method terms [Reggio, 'free-flow', 'learning stories', High-scope, schema] and that initial negotiations with Children's Centres would valuably include enquiring about the model and principles of practice.

Getting to the Centre

For early years settings to take children out on visits always presents a number of practical issues - transport, providing sufficient numbers of adults to meet legal requirements and making prior health and safety checks. Two Children's Centres hired transport, a third was within walking distance, but relied on parents to bring their children and a fourth walked children 'crocodile fashion' accompanied by additional members of staff booked for that day. Full cohorts of preschool children arrived at the centres [on average 20] when the visits were built-in to the preschool day. Relying on parents to make their own way with their children resulted in much lower attendance. One rural setting which had been involved in the preliminary setting-based activity with Travelling Light, did not organise transport to attend the performance at the Meeting House, Ilminster. The practical aspects can be a barrier, particularly in rural areas where distances are greater and public transport unavailable.

The Children's Centre which provided coach transport for parents with their children resulted in the highest number of children and parents attending and children of a mixed age range [27 children, 10 parents, and 6 staff]. Being very clear on the most suitable numbers of children in relation to space, the nature of the

activity, the adults and other facilities is important. However, as a bonus this coach-trip visit attracted parents who would not typically attend such events. When asked if the parents attending were those parents who could typically be depended upon to participate, the manager commented: 'some of them, I'm surprised they've come, they're not the ones I would have expected to see'.



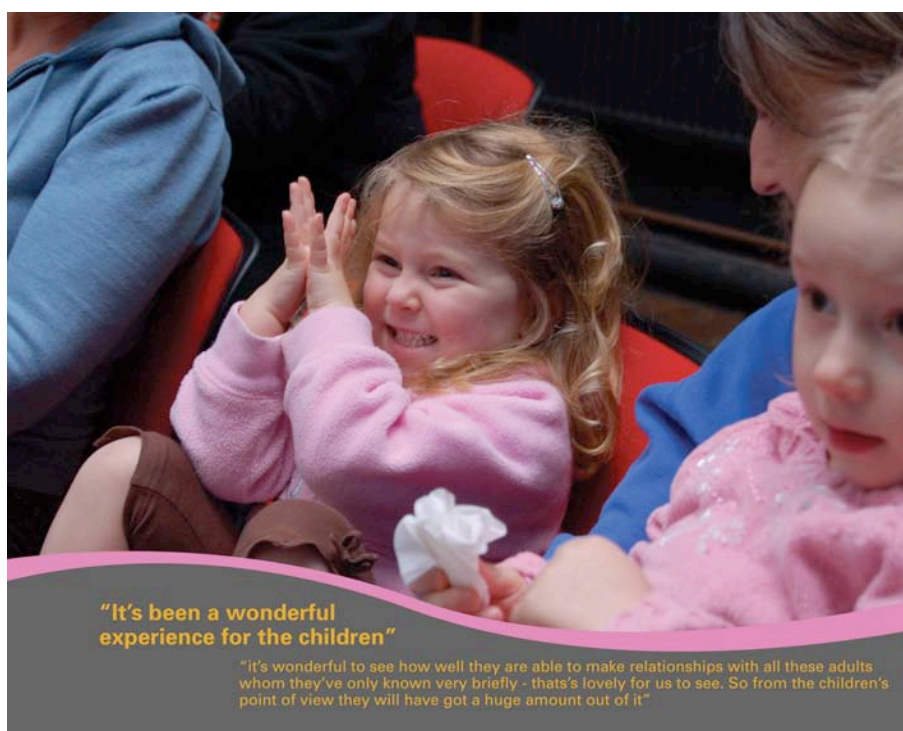
Shadow Play: Performance in the Arts Centres

According to the programme notes "[Shadow Play] start[s] with an empty clean space, a wall of white paper – an abstract world into which the four performers emerge. Without trying to physically represent children, they take on the inner distinctive nature of childhood as they investigate their surroundings and each other. To a child playing is a serious business where discoveries are made about the world around them. Wanting to fit in and belong, make friends, be individual, take control, are all aspects of behaviour we explore in the piece.

To draw our young audience into this imaginary world, the materials and objects used are all familiar, everyday things that homes and school classrooms contain – paper, scissors, paint, balls etc., but used in less familiar ways, so that creatures made out of paper surprise, hands become puppets, shadows come alive and dance, and balls turn into magical glowing stars. The piece is wordless with the emphasis on the visual, aural and spatial. Dance, music, action and design all help create this abstract, stylised world, yet one which we all recognise and are challenged and inspired by."

The play was non-verbal and other forms of expression - physical movement, mime with simple objects and music - predominated. Theatre for very young children is developing these forms of expression, moving away from the text and literature dominated traditions of conventional theatre and which have persisted in theatre intended for older children. In describing early years theatre productions in Taube (2006) explains that 'the medium of those forms of expression is the player' him or herself. He goes on to propose that theatre for very young children is an art of minimalist kind, an art of the concentration of means but not an art of simplification'. Shadow Play does not have a narrative in the conventional sense – more a series of events, in which each event pushes forward the next, rather than each event having a place within an overarching story-structure.

The theatre production was designed for performance in the traditional theatre spaces of stage and seated spectators so it did not involve active physical participation by the audience of children. Some theatre designed for young children has moved away from conventional staged production to form and content which encourages more interactive relationships between children as participants and – literally – the players. However, the majority of children in the audience were engaged, some actively commenting, laughing, pointing and addressing the actors; certainly in the more intimate, informal setting of the Ilminster Meeting House where the performance was observed. As will always be the case with this age phase, a small minority of the children were less engaged; a couple even withdrawing.



How the education activity which takes place in the settings is integrated in to the production and performance processes of the theatre, Roger Wooster suggests is a dilemma which is not resolved within conventional Theatre in Education (TIE) processes as a whole (Wooster, 2007). Redington (1983) points out that theatrical elements of TIE are a means to an educational end and distinguishes TIE from Children's Theatre which, she maintains 'can, and frequently does happen in a vacuum' and does not aim to provide 'an educational resource'. If the aim of a performance piece is to introduce children to theatre and particularly the pleasure of theatre, how does that marry with activity in settings which may be shaped more by education philosophies and approaches? The issue may lie in the tendency of education to look ahead, to consider children as 'becoming' rather than 'being'; whereas theatre is concerned with 'being', children's experience in the here and now. Winston (2003: 206) writes 'theatre offers children . . . social, psychological and cultural benefits. It is not a question of . . . the longer term, to be the adult audiences of tomorrow [or the educated adults of tomorrow], but of meeting their immediate cultural and human needs.' The theatre performance of Shadow Play provided a vivid physical, emotional and intellectual experience for the children now, in the present. It provided an experience of things new and unexpected – hands which appeared through torn holes in a paper screen. It asked the children to imagine, speculate and make connections with the familiar – folding paper which became an ice-cream or a sea gull.

Section 2: Developing Audiences

Interview and questionnaire study

Purpose

The purpose of this strand of research was to gather information about prior attendance at the arts venues, about the parents' general attendance at arts events and whether they take their children out to activities and if so, what kinds of activities. This information will increase understanding of the prospective new audiences and how they might be encouraged to participate in events at the centres. Interviews were carried out at two settings. At a third Children's Centre questionnaires were administered by the staff. At a fourth setting, the staff declined to administer the questionnaire for reasons of staffing capacity.

All parents signed a consent form ensuring confidentiality in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Exeter.

Location 1: Interviews

The following set of short, semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents attending the session at Theatre Centre 1. Of the 10 parents attending, 8 were interviewed, including the two fathers present. They were conducted informally and responses recorded in writing. This style of interviewing was adopted [instead of a questionnaire survey] because parents with small children have their 'hands full' and so cannot easily complete a questionnaire. It also usefully sidesteps any difficulties associated with literacy skill. It has the advantage that verbal responses are generally more detailed, fluent and spontaneous and allows for personal contact with the respondents to give assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

The questions covered the following:

- Age of parent and child
- Family members
- Type of housing and location
- Attendance at this theatre
- Frequency and reasons for travel to the centre of town
- Attendance at events of any type with their children
- Provision of out-of-home education/entertainment activities for their children

The second mother to be interviewed with a family of 5 children said that with 'anything like this, affording it is the problem. I've got lots of children and if one goes they must all go'. After this point was raised, other parents were asked if cost would be a factor. The general response was that it was good when something was free – like this event - and that for those with larger families, cost is likely to be a factor. However, it was not confirmed as a serious issue. Every parent was asked if they came in to the Somerset Carnival because this is a cultural event which I anticipated they would all have attended. It is interesting that all but one of the families had come out to the Carnival suggesting that when motivation is high, other barriers such as transport, managing several children and self-organisation will be overcome.

The key finding from this set of interviews was that for all the parents this was the first time they had attended the theatre with their children. One had been to this theatre as a schoolchild and another had called in once to visit a friend who worked there in the kitchen.

The other point to note is that there were few contributions to the question about the kinds of activities or events they take their children out to. Several replied to this question that they take their children to preschool or nursery since several of these preschool children spent a majority of their time in out-of-home care. There are likely to be children who qualify for free full-time nursery places. Only one parent listed several activities that she provides for her older children 'to keep them off the streets'. These were sport and social club activities. Although the information is gathered from a small sample, these responses line up with general research in to differences between middle class 'intensive parenting' (as it is often termed) and working class more relaxed parenting. It is likely that these parents do not organise or provide extra activities for their children in the form of attendance at regular classes, one-off externally organised events or trips out. Cost and transport in to the centre of town are certainly factors. In asking where their homes were, most gave information in relation to the Children's Centre as 'just over the road', or 'just around the corner from' the centre. When on foot, with buggies and other children, convenience is important.

There are, however, many other factors at play here – motivation, organisation, confidence and, importantly, giving value to such activities. One father described how he takes his son quad bike riding at the weekend; an activity which fits his own interest in agricultural vehicles and fits with what he considers appropriate and valuable for his own son.

Table 1: Interviews LOCATION 1

Attending the event in Theatre Location 1	Housing	Family	Have you been to the theatre location 1 before?	Do you go out – to any kind of events?	Do you come in to the centre of town?
Mother 24 Son 3 yrs	Rented flat	Son 18months in daycare	No	Carnival	Not very often – sometimes for shops
Mother 35 Daughter 2 yrs	Rented House	3 other daughters – 17, 7, 4 plus new baby due Partner	No	Christmas carols by candlelight – the Carnival	Occasionally to shop
Father 36 Son nearly 4 yrs Shared access	Rented, shared flat	Separated	Not since I was a child on school trips – and had a friend who used to be a chef there, so sometimes popped in	In to Bristol for night life I think his mother took him to Carnival	No
Mother 26 Son 3 yrs	Rented house	Daughter 2 yrs, Partner	No	Carnival and attend some events run by Sure Start	Quite regularly in to town centre to shop
Mother 25 Daughter 3	Rented house	Girl 11 months	No	No other music or	Quite often for

yrs				theatre-type events – go to gym at xxxxx Carnival	shopping
Mother 38 Daughter 3 ½ yrs	Rented house	Twins, boys 10, boy 5 Partner	Came to the theatre at Christmas – didn't realise there was a café in the Theatre. First time I've been to anything like this	Carnival. Older boys do a lot of school activities, swimming, karate, boys brigade, youth club, I don't want them on the streets.	Most weeks for shopping
Parent 23 (physically disabled) Father 38 Daughter just 4	Rented house	No other children	Knew theatre was here – haven't been inside before - partner comes to chemist everyday near here	Haven't been to anything else like this before. We sometimes go out flying her kite	Most days – with partner
Mother 32 Son 3	Rented house	Children 5 yrs and 8 ½ months Partner	No	Carnival	Sometimes – just to shop
<i>Most children were 3 years old</i> <i>The ethnicity of all interviewees was white British</i>	<i>All families lived in rented houses very close to the Children's Centre</i>	<i>Most families had 2 or more children</i>	<i>No parents had brought their children to events at the Brewhouse before or attended themselves</i>	<i>They did not attend arts events. All but one attended the Carnival</i>	<i>All families lived on the outskirts of town, location 1 and varied in how regularly they came in to the centre of town</i>

Location 2: Interviews

The second set of 7 interviews [5 parents, 1 couple plus a group of 4 childminders] was carried out during the stay and play session which preceded the visit to the arts centre, Location 2. The health visitor also attended the stay and play and was set up in a small adjoining room. Mothers could combine visits to the health visitor with the stay and play. This probably accounts for the average, younger age of the children present and the higher frequency of two children per parent. It also resulted in more coming and going and some peripheral participation (older children watching on the margins while mothers attended the health visitor), so that the total number attending the session was difficult to calculate. I interviewed those parents and the childminders who stayed for the duration of the session.

The stay and play was situated just on the edge of the main town area close to a new development of link and semi-detached housing. This would explain the high

incidence of owned housing and (implied from this information) the higher economic circumstances of this sample of families. Location 2 is a more compact town than Location 1 and this area was close to the centre, it was therefore less relevant to ask the question about travelling in to the centre of town. A group of 4 childminders attended the stay and play regularly bringing with them a group of approximately 8 children they cared for and they were interviewed as a group.

Table 2: Interviews LOCATION 2

Attending the event at the Stay and Play	Housing	Family	Have you been to the Location 2 Arts Centre before?	Do you go out – with or without your children – to any kind of events?
Grandmother Granddaughter 2 ½ yrs	Owned house, recently moved from London	New baby sister, mother and father	New to the area – but yes, been about 2/3 times, look around, have a coffee, have a friend who does jazz singing there so she keeps me up to date with what's on	Lots and lots of arts things – and library, other groups, friends. Not many 'arts-type' things with her (granddaughter) though
Mother 34 Son 17 months	Owned house	No other children Partner	Where is the arts centre? No, I haven't been	I work 3 days a week, take him swimming one day, to playgroup on 2 days
Mother 32 Son 1 yr, son 2 ½ yrs	Owned house	Partner	No, haven't been – don't know where it is. Might have gone ages ago when I was at school, but can't remember	Haven't been to the theatre for ages – used to go to Bristol for shows, before the children. Don't go to anything with the children.
Father 30 Mother 27 Girl 6 months	Owned house, just nearby		Mother – yes, 2 or 3 times with the children I work with, at a special school. Father – a couple of times a year, to look at art exhibitions	As part of my job with the sp school I've been to Hippodrome, Old Vic, Brewhouse. I suppose we go to the Hippodrome ourselves a couple of times a year – we've seen Les Miserables, Sat Night Fever She's too young yet – but I expect we'll take her to things
Mother 21 Daughter 2 yrs	Housing association	Partner left this week	Not recently – where I was working before, we	I haven't been to the theatre or go to anything like that. I used to watch shows with my nieces and nephews – pantos

			went to have a look around. I've not been to anything there.	and things, but not now.
Mother 34 Son 3 yrs 3 mo, son 12 mo	Owned house	Partner	Not in years, many years ago when I was working in the centre – I was an optometrist	We only come here (to stay and play) or go out to visit friends, to the park or something, we go swimming
<u>4 childminders</u> One or two children each aged 6 months through to 3 yrs	N/A	N/A	Know where it is, but haven't been inside	We go out everyday to something – toy library, stay and play, and we have our own group and organise someone to do music. We do an arts and crafty thing in the summer in V. Park – that's nice. In the Summer we take them outside more. Haven't been to theatres – no, went to the Bristol Hippodrome once, oh, and F. went to Polka in Wimbledon once.
<i>The average age of the children was 21 months.</i> <i>The ethnicity of all interviewees was white British</i>	<i>All but one lived in owned houses</i>	<i>No families had more than 2 children – all very young children</i>	<i>No parents had brought their children to events at the Location 2 Arts Centre or had attended performance events. Only 2 had entered the foyer area as adults.</i>	<i>Small pattern of attendance at theatre events, mostly in Bristol before parents had children.</i>

This set of interviews provides some interesting comparisons with the first set. Although there is more attendance at theatre, arts events and activities organised for their children, few of them have been to the Location 2 Arts Centre and if they have been, only dropping to use the cafe or to look at the art exhibitions. These children are, on average, in the younger age phase and so it is perhaps less likely that the parents may be organising visits and activities for them. However, this group of parents probably represents those who have fewer hindrances [they have the finance, transport, self-organisational abilities and confidence] to attending their local cultural centre as a family for child-appropriate events, and yet some did not know where the Location 2 Arts Centre was.

The follow-on session at the Arts Centre was attended by only two parents from the original stay and play sessions – the grandmother with the two-year-old, accompanied this time by her daughter and the newborn, and a the 21 year-old mother with a two-year-old. Both attendees were exceptional, for very different reasons; the grandmother's family, because they are among the very small

proportion of regular art attenders and the young mother because she was experiencing a period of personal disruption and was looking for support from the Children's Centre staff she knew would be present. Thus the follow-on event failed to draw in the majority of parents who attended the stay and play. There are some straightforward reasons, primary among them that the Arts Centre session did not occur on the same day as the stay and play group: parents and carers often have regular and inflexible weekly patterns.

Location 3: Questionnaires

The Location 3 sessions (both setting-based and theatre-based) were organised for children attending the nursery sessions at a Children's Centre where parents were not present. The nursery staff administered a short questionnaire for parents to complete at 'pick-up' times². The questionnaire data is tabulated below to correspond to the interview data.

Table 3: Questionnaires FROME

Age of child	Housing	Family	Has your child and/or have you been to the Merlin Theatre before?	Do you go out – to any kind of events?
Boy 3yrs 10 mo	Owned	2 other children Girls 8 and 9 ½	No	No Swimming occasionally with sisters
Girl 3 yrs 6 mo	Owned	1 other child 6 years	No	Cinema – to see Happy Feet No
Girl 3 yrs	Owned	No other children	Not child Yes (parents) – loads	Art gallery, concerts and festivals Swimming
Boy 3 yrs 9 mo	Rented	No other children	No	Cinema Art gallery Concert Swimming Riding
Boy 3 yrs 6 mo	Rented	1 other child 5 ½	No No	No No
Girl 3 yrs 5 mo	Rented	No other children	No No	No Swimming Dance Walking, outings
Boy 3	Rented	5 other children, 1, 5, 6, 7, 8 yrs	No No	Cinema No
Boy 3 yrs 8 mo	Owned	1 other 5 ½ yrs	Yes – puppet theatre Yes – lots,	Cinema – Ratatouille Art Gallery –

² With thanks to the nursery staff who administered the questionnaire and then returned them by post.

			grew up in Location 3, went to college here and since then, lots of plays and dance	Black Swan and Rook Lane No activities
Girl 3 yrs 10 mo	Owned	1 other 2 yrs	No No	No Swimming 6 week dance course
Girl 4 yrs	Owned	1 other 7 yrs	No Yes – 3 times approx Carnival Choosing West Side Story	Cinema – Mr Bean on Holiday, Ratatouille Art Gallery – Black Swan Swimming
Boy 4 yrs	Rented	1 other 1 yr	No Yes – 3 times approx College students' plays, musicals	No Swimming
Girl 3 yrs Family newly arrived from Poland	Rented	No other children	No No	Cinema Museum (both in Poland before arriving) No
<i>The children were aged 3 – 4 yrs The ethnicity of all the children was white British except for one newly arrived white Polish. [Based on interview with staff member.]</i>	<i>6 owned 6 rented</i>	<i>Family constitution varied</i>	<i>Only one child had attended an event at the Merlin Theatre before – and this family are frequent attenders at the theatre</i>	<i>5 children have been to no other cultural activity 6 children are reported as going to the cinema 4 to art galleries 2 to concerts 1 to museum (in Poland) 5 children to no other activities 7 children go swimming 2 combine swimming with other activity – dance and riding</i>

This group of nursery children all fall within the older age phase of 3 to 4 years. The mix of owned and rented housing would imply mixed socio-economic backgrounds of the children and this was confirmed in an interview with the lead staff member. In terms of taking their children out to cultural centres or activities, the numbers are also roughly half and half. However, the cinema is the most popular activity and all

but one have never been to the local Theatre. Significantly, the one child who had been to the theatre belonged to a family who were frequent attenders at dance and theatre events.

Interpretations

Although the samples are small, the interviews and questionnaires reveal some interesting patterns which are likely to be consistent across larger, similar populations of young children and parents. The three samples represent three different populations which would be characteristic of Somerset's market towns. A lower socio-economic population living on an estate of local authority housing on the outskirts of town, a higher socio-economic population living on newly built housing occupying an area closer to the centre of a smaller town and a mixed population living in an area of mixed local authority and older housing, also within walking distance to the centre of town.

The most significant finding is that with very few exceptions, parents had not attended an event with their young children in the theatres or arts centres. Although there are factors such as finance, transport, self-organisation and confidence which could mitigate against attendance among the lower socio-economic group, even among the higher socio-economic groups, attendance was rare. While acknowledging that the Location 2 sample consisted of younger children who might be the least likely to attend, the middle class population of Location 3 with older children had also not attended the theatre. The parents of these children take them out to the cinema and swimming, which suggests that there are no practical hindrances. These findings line up with the recent report in to patterns of arts attendance which revealed a very small percentage of 'voracious' art attenders (Bunting et al, 2008) and a very high percentage of 'little or never'. This report suggests that while practical issues may be part of the reason for what it calls 'self exclusion' from arts activities, 'psychological' barriers associated with self-identity and lifestyle choices are likely to be the most significant barriers that should be tackled. This also lines up with the discovery that almost without exception the parents in Location 1 had attended the carnival with their small children suggesting that when an activity accords with self-identity, is perceived as relevant and affirming, then any practical difficulties are overcome.

On the evidence of such a low base line in attendance, the project was successful in bringing young children in to the theatre spaces of these arts centre buildings within their own locality. In Location 1 it was successful in also bringing several parents who had never been to the theatre before to attend an event and in Location 2, a small success. In Location 3, there was no intention to bring parents in to the theatre for the theatre-based session.

Spaces

In 'just inside' arts centre spaces – the foyer, art exhibitions, café and shops – offer a transition between the outside and dark, perhaps daunting (even frightening to young children) interior of the theatre and may be particularly important in creating a bridge to draw families with young children in to the centre. The Sticky, Fingers and Toes project culminated in a displays of photos and captions to be placed in foyer areas where, on the evidence of the interviews and questionnaires, parents are most likely to pop in, particularly where the centres are close to town centres.

The architecture of the buildings, however, varies considerably and some centres are fortunate to have spaces more adaptable to activities involving young children and their families than others. The Merlin Theatre education officer worked to move furniture and other obstacles to create a welcoming, light area with carpeted floor in the foyer of the theatre where children could arrive and have a warm-up session.

Parents and children used the education room and studio rooms at the Brewhouse; a theatre offering more varied accommodation. The Meeting House at Ilminster may not have the black-out and stage facilities suitable for theatre performance, but its open, fluid space made it easily accessible and its location is very convenient. Bridgwater Arts Centre occupies smaller accommodation, but its coffee shop and art exhibition drew in a few. Taunton Brewhouse, close to the shopping area, has its location as an advantage. Several parents knew where it was. Innovative schemes to draw parents in to centres - a coffee and creativity crèche during shopping hours for example³ – might be explored.

According to educators from the influential approach to early years education in Northern Italy in Reggio Emilia, the environment is the ‘third educator’. The theatre environments offered some possibilities for interesting activity with young children, albeit with some drawbacks too. Some experience and knowledge of young children was needed to anticipate how they might interact with the spaces – everything from health and safety, to what they would find playful and fascinating. While a tiered seated auditorium may seem, at first, to have little potential, the tip-up seating, the numbered rows, the lighting and special effects offered a wonderland of experiences for the three and four-year-olds in Frome.

‘It was lovely for them to have that space, when they first came in and could run about, it was lovely’ (Children’s centre manager)

In Conclusion

To summarise the findings of this strand of the research:

- Almost no parents had previously been to the theatre/cultural centre.
- The age and socio-economic background of the children seemed to make little difference to attendance.
- A very small number of ‘avid’ theatre goers had taken their children.
- A few had ‘popped-in’ for café, exhibition, shop; Two had positive memories of secondary school visits.
- Cost or getting there appeared not to be factors.

As the emphasis on participating in cultural and arts activity in a family context appears to be growing strongly, it becomes increasingly important for Somerset Arts Promoters to develop their practice to provide access to the theatre for diverse populations of children and their families. From the evidence of this strand of the research, unless active efforts are made, only a very small proportion of children will attend. If theatre is to become, democratically, a cultural entitlement for all children then it is not only the practical aspects of catering for young children in ‘family friendly’ practices that need to be considered, but also the more subtle and complex issues of how parents might be actively supported in attending, in understanding how to design appropriate, artistically valuable activities for young children and families and more significantly, how to encourage parents to recognise the value of arts activity with their children. This last point may be key.

³ An Oxford organisation, PEEP have rented shop space called the ‘Playshop’

Section 3: Developing Partnerships

Literature and policy review, meetings and interviews

Purpose

The value of partnerships, particularly with organisations who have had little past engagement with the arts, is seen as vital for new resources and sustainability (Matarasso, 2004). However, some organisations may need persuading of the intrinsic and wider value of the arts and collaborating with arts promoters. For partnerships with early years education, arts promoters can engage strategically with a number of recent trends and priorities in education and thereby support mutual aims:

- Play-based, imaginative activity is a strong dimension of early years education.
- 'Creative development' is one strand of the new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).
- A requirement in the EYFS is for young children to have contact with artists and cultural centres.
- Learning in families is increasingly emphasised.
- The introduction of the Cultural Offer promotes learning in cultural centres.

The Sticky Fingers & Toes project brought staff from SAP and from Children's Centres together to liaise over practical arrangements and to work together during the practical theatre activity in their respective centres.

Theatre and Arts Centre Staff

A preliminary meeting of the four participation and learning officers from each of the theatre/arts centres discussed the aims and structure of the project together with raising awareness of the practicalities involved in working with preschool children and their parents or carers. The first visit took place at the Brewhouse Theatre. Key learning points emerged from follow-up review discussions concerned primarily with the practicalities of working with young children in centres. These were written up as a checklist and sent to the three centres next on the schedule (see Appendices 1 and 2).

The theatre/arts centre professionals attended the preliminary sessions in the early years setting in order to, as one said, 'get a feel for the children and the types of activity' in preparation for the children's visits to their centre.

"What we've learnt from SF&T is how to work with Children's Centres that we hadn't worked with before." (Learning and participation coordinator, meeting notes)

Children's Centre Staff

There is a new requirement for Children's Centre to appoint qualified teachers with a specialism in early years to lead their curriculum development. In each partnership the Children's Centre teacher played a key role; either as the direct partner or in negotiating the partnership. Charged with developing and improving practice in Children's Centres, these teachers value the contribution of creative arts practice in early years, have higher expectations of practice and are assertive and confident partners to work with. They are mostly new in post, the roles are multi-dimensional

and still becoming established. These new early years professionals are likely to become the key partners in future developments for early years arts activity.

In this project, good working relationships were forged by the theatre and arts centre officers and the Children's Centre teachers to organise and carry out the project itself. Two of these relationships have continued very productively.

'we think the experience of working with these people has inspired us as a whole school, we're working towards the creative curriculum, across the whole nursery' (educator)

Brokerage

The role of brokerage in partnership should not be overlooked as Holden (2008: 6) emphasises:

Brokerage – the expertise applied in bringing together cultural educators with schools and others – performs an important function in the development of cultural learning. Often, brokerage is an inadequate term to describe the deep relationships nurtured between schools (and others) and cultural educators. Creative Partnerships is the largest and most obvious example, with a now well-established track record and Ofsted-assessed performance... Given the divide already noted between the education and cultural sectors, brokerage is a very necessary function, worthy of extension and investment.

Brokerage in this project was provided by Gina Westbrook of Take Art who had considerable prior expertise of placing artists to work in early years educational contexts and of working with Somerset Arts Promoters. In this project her role as project coordinator was essential in setting up and then fine-tuning the practical arrangements and supporting the working partnerships involved.

Early Years Advisory Service

The project also involved partnership working between Somerset Arts Promoters and the higher levels of county-wide early years educational management and advisory service; again, brokered by Take Art. These staff are responsible for developing early years care and education within national targets and agendas and also have control of certain budget streams. They are professionals who juggle a large number of responsibilities and are stretched to capacity, so while projects such as Sticky Fingers & Toes was able to secure the support and involvement of key staff, it also needed to minimise demands. It was important to find points of congruence between county-wide early years priorities and the priorities of Somerset Arts Promoters. Building bridges between different interests requires new ways of thinking for everyone involved.

Maximising Partnership Skills

Understanding the skills and processes of partnership working, the 'inter-professional' collaborations it requires, is currently high on the agenda of Children's Centres as they move towards integrating services within coordinated units. Courses and professional development initiatives are supporting inter-agency working. Similarly, various initiatives are supporting the development of working partnerships between artists and educators through programmes such as TAPP in London and 5X5X5=Creativity based in Bath. Artists and educators are encouraged to explore and find solutions to the tensions and dilemmas that may arise from working together. However, while recognition that there are challenges and skills inherent in inter-professional working is beginning to circulate in both arts practice and early years practice, professional development in these areas is still thin on the ground.

And while partnership working for education officers in arts and cultural centres will have some similarities with artists and educators working together, or collaboration in early years 'inter-agency' teams, there will be key, specialised areas of understanding they need to develop as well. This project certainly facilitated and increased learning in partnership working for the SAP partners involved, but as it becomes increasingly part of the remit of arts organisations to develop collaborative activity with education centres, then further professional development in the knowledge and skills required would be beneficial.

It is important in inter-professional working to find shared points/pivots of understanding and to recognise how an internal professional discourse may be less effective when working with others from different fields. For example, the language of arts professionals, particularly when drawing heavily on Arts Council discourse in formal meetings, struck one education manager as being obtuse, lacking in awareness of the educational context and the demands under which they work and thus, inadvertently, tending to prioritise their own organisational perspectives. This was in spite of sensitive management of the discussion by the meeting chair. Equally, arts organisations and artists frequently complain that education and care organisations have their own jargon, are narrowly concerned with basic educational targets and for their priorities to be curriculum driven and unimaginative.

'before we started, when we were arranging the whole process, we know that it's leading up to a performance, but it's quite vague as to just what they are getting from the children – do you understand what I'm saying?' (educator)

Increasingly organisations are imagining new kinds of professional roles, hybrid roles which sit in-between education and arts such as the animateurs of community music and music organisations.

Arts activity and cultural learning for young children is often isolated and fragmented. It needs much more integration at all levels, from the organisational, and ground level to the regional and national levels. This places demands on SAP members to recognise that planning for and coordinating early years projects requires the drawing together of information from a wide range of sources and liaison across many spheres of experience. It is not, as emphasised before, that they need to be prior experts in all these areas, but to recognise that they will need to consult and liaise with others in bringing together this information.

SAP members will need to know how to design EY projects to fit:

- national policy agendas – both for early years and for arts;
- national regulations for health and safety;
- local authority strategic priorities;
- the local pedagogy of individual Children's Centres;
- the local communities of families served by the Children's Centres;
- local, national and international developments in arts activity with very young children and what counts as quality.

Partnership Developments

The project has generated a number of follow-on developments which promise to lead to more sustained engagement between Children's Centres and their local cultural centres. These are listed below:

The Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton

With Hillside and Hollies Children's Centres, Taunton a project called PLAYn Texture has been initiated looking at textiles. This project has adopted the structure introduced in SF&T. Phase 1 takes place in the Children's Centres and Phase 2 in the

Brewhouse. The budget has included the element which emerged as key in this project: the transport of children to the centre of Taunton. This is clear evidence of the participation and learning coordinator for the Brewhouse, incorporating learning from the SF&T project in a new enterprise.

One of the artists working with the Travelling Light team has continued to work at the Circles Nursery at the Acorns Children's Centre, funded in association with Take Art. Further planning for new initiatives is taking place with the Circles teacher, Karen Wickett, who took part in the SF&T project.

The Meeting House Arts Centre, Ilminster / The David Hall Arts Centre, South Petherton

The Ile Valley Children's Centre in Ilminster was not yet fully operational, but the managing staff of the preschool which took part in SF&T commented on how easy it had been to walk the children to the Meeting House, what a good event it had been and 'what a nice space it was for the children'. When interviewed, they said that they would certainly come again to anything similar that was planned for young children. The setting in nearby South Petherton, a rural village, did not come to the performance of Shadow Play in Ilminster because of difficulties with transport and the Manager of the Meeting House will explore ways to overcome the transport issue (meeting notes.)

"We thought, with two groups in the town and a third one is opening, we could get together and come here for something, we could share the costs and talk to Zoë about getting something together" [manager of Ile Valley Children's Centre]

The Merlin Theatre, Frome

With the Key Centre in Frome, the Merlin is running a new early years music project which has started in the Summer term. This will link activity in the Theatre with activity in the centre.

SPAEDA

Although not directly involved in this project, spurred by the increased early years arts activity across Somerset, SPAEDA have identified artists who want to develop their early years expertise and are exploring how to set up opportunities for 'shadowing' and mentoring.

SCC/Somerset Arts Promoters/ACE RFO posts

The most significant developments are through this Somerset Thrive process, leading in 2009 to the creation of three Creative Practitioners posts in three town hubs of Children's Centres and Somerset Arts Promoters. An Early Years Specialist responsible for the strategic development of Early Years creativity on behalf of SAP is also being established. Both of these developments are ACE funded, with additional support from SCC and the Children's Centres for the former.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Interim feedback and 'feed-forward' document circulated to project participants.

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

In general

Aim for smaller groups

Shorter time per group

Children grouped according to age

Differentiate work with toddlers and parents OR preschoolers and Children's Centre staff

Being clear on who does what

Some detail

Time

How long will the children spend at the venue?

- Breaking the time into shorter sessions
- Scheduling a break
- Allowing time for arrival and settling
- Remembering that for the children and accompanying adults the whole trip includes the coach/minibus ride – so more than just the time in the theatre.

Spaces

Where will the children be?

- A clear space for children to sit in a group or circle on the floor
Thinking about: room temperature, clean floor surface, a rug (rugs) on the floor if there are likely to be babies
- The theatre space – experiencing the space, the seating, the lighting etc.
- Is there an outdoor space - for a break and some fresh air?
- Furniture – clearing spaces as much as possible, looking out for sharp corners on furniture and other hazards.
- Security. If the room has open doors – is there a possibility the children can escape?

Facilities

- Drink and snack time for children – who provides and how? Coffee for whole adult team is appreciated.
- Toilets – thinking of small children? Hand-drying at child height? Nappy changing facilities? Will there be toddlers in nappies who may need a larger lie-down space for changing?

Numbers and Ages

12 children (older 3 year olds), 3 adults from centre + theatre education officer, 3/4 artists - worked well in Frome

Children under 3 will need more adults.

Adults

The accompanying adults.

- Children and Children's Centre teacher plus nursery nurses – probably easy, good collaboration, the opportunity to negotiate mid-stream to fine tune the activities. They will mediate and 'translate' to enable the children to get the most out of what is offered.
- Children and parents – has a different dynamic and working relationship. Working with parent-child pairs. It can be valuable to address parents more directly to give them clear information about how they might be expected to participate.
- Children and Children's Centre staff and parents – there may be extra agendas running around here to be aware of, for example, the centre's need to involve and work with parents.

The venue education office.

- Lots of planning behind the scenes and in advance. Taking care of small detail.
- During visit – observing, checking, monitoring, helping out when useful. Taking a direct role at working with children if helpful, taking a proactive role in talking to parents about the centre, inviting them, having leaflets ready to hand out, offering them a free drink in the café, [a nice outing for them] – OR – leaflets/pictures to go back to centre for parents. How can venue-parent links be initiated and developed?

Activities

Who will provide and manage the activities - Travelling Light?

Does the venue need to provide any activities?

Will the centre bring any activities?

If the venue is providing activities, liaising with Children's Centre to ensure they are appropriate.

Having some shorter activities for wind-down or waiting times – songs, a story, a puppet - who will provide these? Again, ensuring age appropriateness.

Talking to children

Adults who have less experience of talking to young children can find this more difficult than they anticipate.

Very often the kinds of introductions that might be given to adults or older children, about what everyone is going to do and so on – can be left out and the activity just started. This can feel odd, impolite even, but the children do not need what for them is abstract information.

Vocabulary needs to be carefully chosen and sentence structure needs to be simpler than you might use in 'normal' conversation. This isn't to imply the kind of 'baby

talk' higher voice tone or exaggerated delivery you hear sometimes when young children are being addressed but that some specific adjustments are valuable. A quick check of the children's ages and language skills will help to determine how to speak with them.

There may be information that needs to be given to adults when they arrive – location of fire exits, toilets. Ask for the lead adult and inform them individually rather than address the whole group with children too.

APPENDIX 2

Venue Visits

Prepare

Communicate with Children's Centre – perhaps plan pre-visit by the Children's Centre link person to discuss practical issues and potential at the venue for exploration and learning

Do either you or Children's Centre staff want to set some ground-rules beforehand?

What do you expect of the Children's Centre staff, theatre group and what do they expect of you in terms of helping manage the children during the visit?

Will any of the children (and parents) have special needs?

Practical

[relating to Family Friendly / health and safety policies?]

Buggies (for younger children)

Toilet access

Any awkward steps or access

Any 'no go' areas [or you can lock/block off]

First aid – will you have a kit ready, or CC staff will bring?

Playfulness

Young children find interest in the unexpected

Enjoying being in large, open spaces

Auditorium seating

Running up and down the aisles, or between the seats

Finding numbering and letters

Stage areas, lighting, sound equipment and any other equipment

Travelling light may then develop ideas around using room spaces, the lighting, the stage area

Leaflets and posters

Tickets

[Do you have spares the children can take back to their centre?]

Outdoor areas?

APPENDIX 3

QUESTIONNAIRE

Permission

I understand that the information I give on this questionnaire will be strictly confidential. The information will be anonymised and used only for the purposes of research for Take Art (early years arts) in Somerset.

Signed:

Date:

Exact age of your child:

How many other children in your family?

And their ages?

Do you live in owned or rented accommodation? Owned Rented

Has your child been to the Merlin Theatre before? Yes No

If yes – about how many times? (approximately)

Briefly, for what kind of event(s)?

Have you been to the Merlin Theatre yourself (not children's event) Yes No

If yes – about how many times? (approximately)

For what kind of event(s)?

Has your child been to any other cultural centres in Somerset – other theatre
cinema museum art gallery concert other?

If yes – give very brief details please (where and what kind of event).

Do you take your child regularly to any activities?

Swimming

Gym

Dance

Music class

Other?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP

Dr Susan Young, University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, Exeter, EX1 2LU

Susan.Young@exeter.ac.uk

APPENDIX 4

Email from Emily Bull,
Learning and Participation Coordinator,
Brewhouse Theatre,
Taunton

Dear All,

Please find attached information about our exciting Family Fun Days coming up in December and January.

All Family Fun Day events are inclusive to the whole family, whatever the age or ability, get involved, have some fun and be creative together in a safe, comfortable width='100%' environment.

Also enjoy some delicious snacks and drinks in the Green Room restaurant, which will have 'children friendly' meals on the menu!

If you could please print off the attached and display it somewhere for all to see.

If you have any questions about the events or anything else about The Brewhouse, please don't hesitate to contact me - my details are below.

Hope to see you on the 22nd December!

Merry Christmas

Emily Bull

Cultural Co-ordinators in Schools

Published 2008

Cultural Co-ordinators work to facilitate arts and cultural heritage visits, events and workshops for their local schools. This list gives contact details of the co-ordinators and also states which Local Authority they work for in Scotland.

APPENDIX 5

Brewhouse Theatre

Q1 Please outline any early years work your Organisation has carried out in the last year:

Increasingly looking at this market (through Emily Bull)
Do family fun days at Brewhouse – linked to events at the Brewhouse, eg Christmas Carol.

Q2 Which artforms? Theatre

Q3 Which Early Years venues:
Looking at other theatres

Bridgwater Arts Centre

Q1 Please outline any early years work your Organisation has carried out in the last year:
Just starting through Thrive

Q2 Which artforms? Senior Youth Theatre created show for under 5s on Healthy eating. Now enlarging the work

Q3 Which Early Years venues: Victoria Centre, Gardens Children's Centre

Q4 How long for?

eg 1 off Workshop or longer project Hope will be for longer projects

Q5 Have you personally had any direct E Y training or experience?

If so, please outline briefly: (Trained as special needs teacher originally)

Q6 Do you have future ambitions for E Y creativity for your Organisation/ Somerset? Yes – moving into this area

David Hall Arts Centre

Q1 Please outline any early years work your Organisation has carried out in the last year:

Haven't done before, now starting point through Thrive

Q5 Have you personally had any direct E Y training or experience? Chair of Pre School so know how it runs from the outside.

Meeting House Arts Centre

Q1 Please outline any early years work your Organisation has carried out in the last year:

Most work done 8 – 14 year olds. Only work with younger has been on family days engaging parents and child.

Now approaching pre-school through Sticky Fingers & Toes project.