

# DOING POLYGLOT

Seven years of collaboration between Polyglot Theatre and  
Mahogany Rise Primary School



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Creative Knowledge Collaborations  
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*Doing Polyglot* – Seven years of collaboration between Polyglot Theatre and Mahogany Rise Primary School

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"I think the summation of the whole process, there's a wonderful body of work that's been created. There's a wonderful body of experience that's been created for the individuals, for the students and the teachers and the community that have come and watched and been a part of that... Or even for me, because that thing's pushing me into some new areas of thought that maybe I hadn't confronted before, or hadn't thought about before, hadn't given the kids the options to do, so I think that richness around all of that is very important."

- **John Culley, Principal, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Interview 2017**

For the past seven years the students and staff at Mahogany Rise have been 'doing' Polyglot. The name Polyglot has been synonymous with a wild ride, immersive multi-arts experience where creativity and imagination are paramount and fun is the backbone, as well as the by-product.

The aim of this report is to provide a longitudinal evaluation of the seven year collaboration between Mahogany Rise Primary School and Polyglot Theatre, based on data collected over seven years, and interviews conducted in 2017 with participants and key stakeholders who have been involved at some point with the partnership. The report has been prepared by Christine Sinclair on behalf of the independent Evaluation company, Creative Knowledge Collaborations.

## Goals (Impact Indicators)

Long-term goals and Impact indicators for the Polyglot-Mahogany Rise partnership are as follows:

### 1. PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What is Polyglot Theatre's process of community engagement in the education setting? How has this developed or changed over the course of the longitudinal partnership with Mahogany Rise Primary School?

### 2. SOCIAL IMPACT

What is the social impact of Polyglot's education partnerships for the children involved? Social impact priorities for this project over time have included:

- a. Improve kids' socio-emotional skills
- b. Increase kids' engagement and success at school
- c. Develop kids' confidence in their creativity and abilities
- d. Improve kids' social cohesion/inclusion
- e. Increase community awareness of kids' creative capacities and the effectiveness of an arts project in schools

### 3. NEXUS BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL ARTS AND EDUCATION?

What is Polyglot's nexus between the professional arts and education? What has been the impact for key stakeholders on their practice and professional development? Key stakeholders include:

- a. Polyglot's professional artists
- b. School principals
- c. Classroom teacher

## Description of the partnership

In 2011, Mahogany Rise Primary School was one of three Frankston schools invited to participate in a workshop program run by Polyglot in conjunction with their professional production, *City of Riddles*. Such was the success of the workshop program at Mahogany Rise Primary School that both the school and the theatre company were encouraged to continue their collaboration.

In 2012, the Arts Victoria's Extended School Residency Program and the DEECD's Strategic Partnerships Program funded the first residency, *Knock, Knock!* at Mahogany Rise Primary School. Polyglot's community outreach arm, Kids in Control, led by Director Kate Kantor, worked with Polyglot Artistic Director Sue Giles and school principal, John Culley to establish the partnership within the school community.

In each of the subsequent five years, Polyglot collaborated with Mahogany Rise Primary School students in an arts residency at the school for a period of between two weeks and two school terms.

In each residency a team of artists from a diverse range of art forms was brought in to collaborate with the children. This provided the children with experience in diverse artistic practices, and allowed them to find a point of entry into the project based on their interests. 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. Resilience, and the idea of transition from primary to secondary school was an underlying principle, but in each project specific themes emerged from the children in dialogue and creative collaboration with the artists. Each project culminated in a public sharing or performance of work created by the children and the artists. Different art forms were highlighted in different years – ranging from installation to dance, music, film and shadow puppetry. These reflected the backgrounds of artists, the interests of the children and the venues in which the final outcome would take place.

The projects created through the Polyglot residencies were as follows:

2011 City of Riddles (workshop pilot)

2012 Knock, Knock! Who's There?

2013 Grit

2014 In My Skin

2015 Revolution of the Rise

2016 Outer Bounds

2017 Altogether

## Funding

Funding for the projects has been drawn from a variety of government and philanthropic sources, including the Extended School Residencies program (Arts Victoria and DEECD) (2012-2014) and Newsboys Foundation (2016-2017) which also provided critical funding to support the longitudinal evaluation of the entire life of the program. Mahogany Rise Primary School has also contributed funds and in-kind support to ensure the longevity of the partnership.

## Key Findings

**Key Finding 1:** Sustainable and substantial funding sources are essential for multi-year extended school residencies to consistently achieve high quality, process driven artistic and socio-emotional outcomes for participants, which then accrue over time.

**Key Finding 2:** Polyglot residencies contributed to the Mahogany Rise transition program by building resilience, demystifying secondary school as a place and an institution and by allowing students to creatively explore transition related fears and thoughts.

**Key Finding 3:** The implementation of Polyglot's strategies for community engagement invited buy-in from key stakeholders. For example:

Preliminary briefings with staff prior to commencement of the program allowed for organisational, conceptual and pastoral input from the classroom teacher and at best, formalised their role in the partnership between school and theatre company. A culminating performance event brought families into the school at the invitation of their children, in a non-threatening and celebratory way.

**Key Finding 4:** When it is not possible to achieve the engagement of a key community stakeholder, the outcomes of the program can be diminished.

**Key Finding 5:** Community engagement builds incrementally, from year to year in a long-term partnership and positively contributes to an environment in which cultural change in the school community is possible.

**Key Finding 6:** Polyglot's child-led approach in their residencies at Mahogany Rise has played a key role in the consistent achievement of the five key social goals identified at the outset of the seven-year partnership.

**Key Finding 7:** The long-term evaluation of the Polyglot-Mahogany Rise partnership provides evidence that the Polyglot approach to arts residencies in the primary school context contributes to the development of several of the general capabilities identified as core to learning in the Australian curriculum.

**Key Finding 8:** Implementing the Polyglot process of working with children requires: highly skilled professional artists who have the capacity to work collaboratively and respectfully with children and other artists; strong and intuitive artistic leadership; logistic and practical support from skilled production staff.

**Key Finding 9:** A productive, respectful partnership between the classroom teacher and Polyglot artists is central to the management of the project and contributes to its ultimate success. Classroom teachers who are open to handing over their classroom to professional arts colleagues and to active participation in the workshops gain most from the experience for themselves and their students.

**Key Finding 10:** 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.

## Recommendations

The report concludes with four key recommendations.

### 1. Funding

This report recommends that funding organizations where possible provide funding for a minimum of three years in order to maximize the resources invested by all stakeholders.

### 2. Evaluation and reflexivity – a powerful tool for artists and arts organisations

This report recommends that Polyglot continue this commitment to evaluative cycles and to build processes of reflection and review with artistic teams throughout the organization.

### 3. Dissemination

This report recommends that Polyglot explore the possibility of partnering with the education sector to conduct a program of systematic research into the potential intersection of a child-led arts program and the development of generic capabilities as indicated in the Australian curriculum.

### 4. Dissemination

This report recommends that Polyglot explore the possibility of consolidating the deep exploration of the child-led process afforded by the seven year collaboration at Mahogany Rise into a formal and substantial publication which could serve to inform other artists, educators, and interested community members about the nature and potential of this approach to school based arts practice.

## INTRODUCTION

### DOING POLYGLOT

For the past seven years the students and staff at Mahogany Rise have been ‘doing’ Polyglot. The name Polyglot has been synonymous with a wild ride, an immersive multi-arts experience where creativity and imagination are paramount and fun is the backbone, as well as the by-product.



Polyglot also signifies a way of working: an inclusive, child-led, democratising process which invites creative risk taking and deep exploration of ideas and possibilities - through art-making, games and conversation. This unique hybrid form could look like a manic game of Cat and Mouse played energetically by adults and children; or building a cubby in a nature reserve; or thirty children drawing simultaneously on a single, very long piece of paper; or it could look like a highly choreographed dance performed for a hundred people. Or, Polyglot could even look like a small group of children huddled in a classroom, deep in conversation with an adult wearing a pirate hat, oblivious to the seeming chaos elsewhere in the room.

Since 2011 the children of Mahogany Rise Primary School and the artists of Polyglot Theatre Company have been coming together in an annual pursuit of what it means to ‘do Polyglot’. Each year, it has been different yet undeniably ‘Polyglot’ in intention, process and outcome. This report reviews this seven year collaboration and considers the practice, the challenges and the impacts of a returning arts residency on participants and offers a series of recommendations for the future. In other words, this report asks, *“What has it meant to ‘do Polyglot’ at Mahogany Rise Primary School?”*



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### PARTNERSHIP

"We've always made a thing at Polyglot where we will only work with people who want us, but to find the people who want us in the areas where we feel that we can do the most good. We're always very interested in working in disadvantaged areas, and with kids who don't have usual access to arts."

**- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017**



Image credit: Jason Heller

Mahogany Rise Primary School was one of three Frankston schools invited to participate in a workshop program run by Polyglot in conjunction with the 2011 Frankston Arts Centre season *City of Riddles*, a theatrical event described as a '360 degree interactive experience'. Such was the success of the workshop program at Mahogany Rise Primary School that both the school and the theatre company were encouraged to continue their collaboration. Artistic Director of Polyglot, Sue Giles approached Mahogany Rise principal, John Culley about a possible arts residency partnership under the auspices of the Extended School Residency Program.

In 2012, Arts Victoria's Extended School Residency Program and the DEECD's Strategic Partnerships Program funded the first residency, *Knock, Knock!*, at Mahogany Rise Primary School. Polyglot's community outreach arm, Kids in Control, led by Kate Kantor, worked with Sue Giles and John Culley to establish the partnership within the school community.

The Extended School Residencies Program continued in 2013 (*Grit*) and 2014 (*In My Skin*). In both instances, Kate Kantor directed the projects and brought in a range of artists to work with the children. The projects were multi-arts focused and culminated in a public, community based event.

From the beginning of the partnership, the theme of transition underscored the development of each project. As there was a particular focus on the transition from primary

to secondary school, the involvement of the nearby secondary school, Monterey Secondary College, became increasingly significant. Year 7 and 8 students (formerly Mahogany Rise students) contributed to final performance outcomes, and in 2014, the Polyglot workshops took place on site at the secondary college. The Year 6's familiarised themselves with the Monterey environment and got to know some of the high school students.

In 2015, Arts Victoria ended its Extended School Residency Program. As a result, Mahogany Rise Primary School and Polyglot independently funded an attenuated, but nevertheless successful program in that year (*Revolution of the Rise*). Their intention was to maintain the relationship between the two organisations and to continue adding annual data for the longitudinal study into the impact of the partnership.

For 2016 and 2017 Newsboys Foundation provided critical funding to allow the partnership to continue with an extended residency model and to support a longitudinal evaluation of the entire life of the program.

The 2016 project (*Outer Bounds*) expanded the arts orientation of the program to include engagement with the natural world. Year 6's worked with ecological designer and artist, Tanja Beer and a park ranger alongside theatre director Kate Kantor in the nearby flora and fauna reserve, The Pines.

In 2017, the final Polyglot residency took place on site at Mahogany Rise Primary School. It was directed by Sue Giles, supported by artists recruited from a range of different art forms. One of the Polyglot artists, musician Nathan Wilson, is also an Educational Support Worker at Mahogany Rise. As a new artist he was mentored by Kids' Collaborations director, Kate Kantor and Sue Giles, and in a sign of cultural change at the school, he is now leading a creative arts program at the school.

Throughout the seven years of collaboration, John Culley has been the Principal of Mahogany Rise and has supported the partnership financially and as a school and community leader.

## MAHOGANY RISE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mahogany Rise Primary School is located in Frankston North, a suburb with a long history of social and economic disadvantage. Teachers at Mahogany Rise observed that children in Frankston North sometimes experience social isolation from the surrounding areas. For example, travelling to Frankston, a suburban centre with commercial, sporting and cultural facilities just a few kilometres away was a 'special occasion' destination for many of the children.

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>1</sup> and many of the students enter school two years behind the State average. The school has a proactive approach to addressing the needs of its students and the wider school community with many innovative programs, including Polyglot and a crowdfunded overseas excursion.

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1

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

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>2</sup>.

## 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 Theatre 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 forefront of contemporary arts experiences for babies and children up to 12 years. As an arts organisation 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. Over the past ten years, Polyglot has had a major interest in the development of big, interactive, participatory work, both theatre and workshop based.

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 Theatre Website

## Kids' Collaborations

Polyglot Theatre originally partnered with Mahogany Rise Primary School 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.

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 Theatre Strategic Plan

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<sup>2</sup> Mahogany Rise Primary School Website <http://mahoganyriseps.com/about-us>

## Polyglot Artists

In each of the seven years of residencies at Mahogany Rise, Polyglot brought in a diverse range of highly skilled professional artists to work with the children. This allowed for a multi-arts approach to the process and outcomes of each project and also ensured that children had the opportunity to see different arts practices at work and to explore the expression of their own ideas through art forms that piqued their interest. The cost of hiring artists was invariably one of the most significant budget items for each project. However, Polyglot was highly committed to the multi-arts team approach to the residencies. The annual project evaluations consistently revealed that the quality and diversity of the artists were major contributing factors to the success of individual projects.

The capacity of particular artists to work with children in the challenging school environment was also a factor in the selection of artists and in the mentoring they were given by the project director during the residency. Some artists found the work inspirational and regenerative and returned a number of times over the seven years, and this added a further dimension to the longitudinal impact of the program.

Each year, to varying degrees, the Polyglot team also included technical and practical support staff. A Production Manager was assigned to each project, providing critical logistical and production support to the artists and the children and also acting as a liaison with teachers. These staffing decisions ensured that the project itself was the focus of Polyglot's efforts and allowed for the aesthetic and conceptual work to be central.

"There was all these extra people – and they were like, we're here to make this the best thing possible, so I found it absolutely fascinating that there were so many people that were ready to prepare the room for these students to do their best performance – it was great to see that there were professionals there to support them."

**- Nathan Wilson, Artist/Education Support worker, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Interview 2017**

## FUNDING

### Summary of funding sources 2011-2017

Year	Project	Funding Organisation	Additional and in-kind support
2011	<i>City of Riddles</i>	Jack Brockhoff Foundation; Australian Children's Theatre Foundation; Bendigo Bank; The Ian Potter Foundation; Matana Foundation for Youth; Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation; Arts Victoria; Windsor Community Bank; Lucas Dental Care.	Frankston Arts Centre.
2012	<i>Knock, Knock!</i>	Arts Victoria's Extended School Residency Program; Department of Education and Early Childhood Department's Strategic Partnerships Program.	Mahogany Rise P.S.; Frankston Arts Centre (in kind).
2013	<i>Grit</i>	Department of Education and Early Childhood Department's Strategic Partnerships Program; Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation; Newsboys Foundation.	Mahogany Rise P.S.; Frankston Arts Centre (in kind).
2014	<i>In My Skin</i>	Arts Victoria's Extended School Residency Program; Department of Education and Early Childhood Department's Strategic Partnerships Program; Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation; Newsboys Foundation.	Mahogany Rise P.S.; Frankston Arts Centre (in kind).
2015	<i>Revolution of the Rise</i>	No funding available.	Mahogany Rise P.S.; Polyglot Theatre.
2016	<i>Outer Bounds</i>	Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation; Newsboys Foundation; Sidney Myer Fund; Helen Macpherson Smith Trust; The University of Melbourne: Melbourne School of Design and Victorian College of the Arts; Australian Communities Foundation.	Mahogany Rise P.S.; Monterey Secondary College.
2017	<i>Altogether</i>	Sidney Myer Fund, Newsboys Foundation.	Mahogany Rise P.S.; Monterey Secondary College.

## SUMMARY OF PROJECTS



Image credit: Sarah Walker

## City of Riddles – 2011

**Artistic Director: Sue Giles**

**Participants: Year 3 Mahogany Rise Primary School**

### *Remembering the project*

"I was actually in it. We did our dream houses made out of cardboard boxes and we showed them at Cube 3 – somewhere in Frankston..."

"[My dream house] was three storeys high and I had parking and a playground upstairs..."

**- Shakira, Year 9, remembering City of Riddles when she was in Grade 3**

### *Description of the project*

*City of Riddles*, the performance, is described as a '360 degree interactive experience' exploring 'freedom and control'. In 2011, *City of Riddles* was performed at the Cube, Frankston Arts Centre.

Polyglot ran a schools' based workshop program in conjunction with the performance at the Frankston Arts Centre. Mahogany Rise PS was one of three Frankston schools invited to participate in the workshop program. The workshop was conducted over three concurrent days, with each group receiving a 2 hour session on each of the first 2 days, followed by 3 hours on the third day. One Polyglot artist was in residence at each of the three schools. The schools' workshop was described in the following way:

The nature of the project is to focus on individual choice and validating the child's own perspective as being important. It encourages children to see beauty or fun or value or unique vision in each other's work, encourages sharing tasks and group connection.

### **Major Challenges:**

Many participating children with poor socio-emotional skill development:

- low in self-confidence,
- did not work easily with others and
- struggled to initiate independent activities.

### **Key Outcomes:**

*City of Riddles* in both performance and workshop forms:

- stimulated creativity, active engagement, agency, and enjoyment.

The performance (for school's audiences):

- maximised engagement and satisfaction in the experience.

Students developed:

- creativity, imagination and cooperative learning.

The artists leading the workshops in the schools:

- demonstrated genuine engagement and respectful interactions with students.
- provided safe, creative learning environments.

"We try to remain fluid and that is the process. Because the task is so simple... it's hard to divert from that. The participants ideas change and divert... allowing them to own that and run with that."

**- Tamara Rewse, Artist, Polyglot Theatre, City of Riddles, 2011**





## Knock, Knock! Who's There? – 2012

**Artistic Director: Kate Kantor**

**Participants: Prep, Year 1, 5 and 6 Mahogany Rise Primary School**

### *Remembering the project*

"Year 4 is where we got involved. There was a sheet [of paper] rolled in the hallway outside the office and we were all drawing."

**- Grace, Year 8, remembering Knock, Knock! when she was in Grade 4**

### *Description of the project*

*Knock Knock! Who's There?* was a multi-disciplinary creative arts workshop themed around the idea of transition. It was delivered to Preparatory, Year One, Year Five and Year Six students over two school terms in 2012. Approximately sixty students were directly involved in the ten week residency. Five Polyglot artists with a diverse range of creative specialties conducted the residency in a child-led process of artistic exploration. Students undertook activities in the areas of drama, animation, visual art, creative writing, puppetry, sound design, music and movement.

"We did one massive, big drawing exercise down the middle of the corridor of that school, with all the whole school involved in it, and we ended up with this huge big drawing. We did a big outdoor playground thing where everyone just did their own desire line from one end to the other...So, that was the beginning."

**- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, remembering Knock, Knock! 2012**

### *Major Challenges*

For one of the teaching team, the open structure of the Polyglot workshops was challenging. She found the workshops:

- disruptive to her students,
- impacted negatively on student behaviour and their ability to resume their routine.

By contrast the other Prep teacher:

- embraced the 'chaos' of the child-led workshops,
- found that her children thrived in the program, and
- grew in confidence and creativity.

### *Key Outcomes*

The students:

- demonstrated a genuine engagement with the workshops and an enthusiasm to participate. Children were treated with respect and encouraged to take the lead creatively in the workshops.
- developed coping mechanisms for change.
- developed an increased confidence in themselves and their fellow classmates, and a more coherent group dynamic.

Trust built between students, teaching staff and artists, and led to:

- bold student-led artistic exploration.
- increased imaginative capabilities and a greater vocabulary of 'play' (younger children).

Language and literacy skills for both the junior and senior students were improved upon in:

- 'authentic' and stimulating ways.

"It allows the teachers to see another expression of the creative process, which a lot of teachers don't normally experience. They don't see a project beginning, middle and end...It gives people more confidence to take something on and to believe that this is possible."

**- John Culley, Principal, Mahogany Rise Primary School, 2012**



## Grit - 2013

**Artistic Director: Kate Kantor**

**Participants: Year 5/6 Mahogany Rise PS; Year 7 Monterey Secondary College**

### *Remembering the project*

"For *Grit*, I found it fascinating that we were having this conversation about grit and having resilience... but even just the word grit, was a bit of a funny word for some kids and even for me, I didn't fully understand it, but **through the creative process** of unpacking ideas and being able to demonstrate resilience or grit in some sort of creative format allowed the exploration of resilience for kids, for it to be a real thing or a tangible experience.

"There were countless times when those students did not have resilience and did not have grit, even in the project or in the classroom... but the fact that they were able to refer back – 'you know in Polyglot they were talking about grit and resilience, don't you think this is a good time to use that?' "

- Nathan Wilson, Artist/Education Support worker, Mahogany Rise Primary School, remembering Grit, Interview 2017



Image credit: Jason Heller

***Description of the project***

Polyglot Theatre worked with the Year 5/6 students at the school three times per week over 2 terms. Three artists and the Artistic Director delivered the project. Using sound, music, creative writing, design, puppetry, performance and film elements, the students were guided through creative development workshops and idea generating sessions leading to the final performance in Term 3. Previous students and project participants, now attending the local high school, were involved in the project to collaborate and mentor the current Year 5/6 students.

The final outcome was an evening event held in the school hall and surrounds for a large number of family, friends and the wider school community. Year 5/6 and Year 7 students were all involved in a multi-modal performance that included a live band playing original music, body percussion, puppetry, performance, song and visual art.

***Major challenges***

Key stakeholders found the process challenging. In 2013, there were/was:

- more students with diverse needs.
- a more challenging and ambitious artistic process.
- fewer artists, and artists had less experience in working in primary schools.
- less project management support.

***Key outcome/s***

The Polyglot team was able to offer a successful, sustained creative workshop process:

- to a group of young people with multiple diverse needs and backgrounds.
- that encouraged the students' resilience.

The young people were equipped with:

- new artistic skills.
- a greater capacity to focus and reflect.
- more confidence and creativity.

"Maybe if you do a job that doesn't ever involve drawing, you like forgot about what you were like when you were little and then like, you didn't draw anymore. But then you look at one of your drawings and think, 'I wonder if I can become an artist... why did I ever stop?' "

**- Year 6 Student, 2013**

## **In My Skin – 2014**

**Artistic Director: Kate Kantor**

**Participants: Year 5/6 Mahogany Rise PS; Year 7 Monterey SC.**

### ***Remembering the project***

"We kind of developed this pretty cool idea which was based on movement, and space and also transition. And this was about – the concept of this was 'In My Skin' so it was more about the children's identity and letting that come out and this was designed with the focus that it was going to be presented at the Frankston Arts Centre. So there was a dance, there was movement and there was lots of video that we had created."

**- Jason Heller, Filmmaker, Polyglot Theatre, remembering In My Skin, Interview 2017**



### ***Description of the project***

Year 5/6 students from Mahogany Rise PS participated in twice weekly workshops at Monterey Secondary College with the Polyglot team under the supervision of the coordinating teacher, exploring the themes of identity and transition. Year 7 students, participants in the previous year's residency at the primary school, were also involved through documenting the process on film. Art forms included VJ-ing, dance, performance, visual art and film. The residency culminated in a one-off public performance at Frankston Arts Centre followed by a two week exhibition in the Cube at the Frankston Arts Centre. Around 140 people, adults and children attended the performance.

***Major challenges***

Many students at Mahogany Rise experience economic and social disadvantage with:

- high levels of poverty and unemployment, single parent families.
- disrupted family environments.

As a state primary school, Mahogany Rise must respond to departmental expectations to deliver core subjects with a non-negotiable focus on literacy and numeracy.

***Key outcome/s***

- The combination of small groups, the involvement of key artists and project staff, and the inclusion of dance as an art form, resulted in high levels of student engagement and student satisfaction.
- There were significant impacts for participants, from skills development through to emotional literacy.
- As a result of the focus on transition, a stronger link between the primary and the secondary school was forged.

"It was very powerful for the students to inhabit spaces that will become theirs in the new year. As well as this, students now have some connection to teaching staff at the high school through a positive and creative engagement."

**- Ricci-Jane Adams, Project Evaluator**



## Revolution of the Rise – 2015

**Project Director: Kate Kantor**

**Artistic Director: Harriet Devlin**

**Participants: Year 6 Mahogany Rise PS**

### *Remembering the project*

"In class, we never really got together with all the students but when Polyglot came we got all together and had team work and we were comfortable with each other, especially when we were dancing and singing in Year 6.

"There was film and we went from primary school to high school, and we were taking a big step. We all had to create that this was safe and we all trust each other, especially when we were singing."

**- Student, Year 8, remembering Revolution of the Rise when they were in Grade 6**

### *Description of the project*

The 2015 partnership was a Graduation project involving an Artistic Director, a Filmmaker and four additional artists, and approximately thirty Year 6 students. There was an orientation towards the Year 6 students' transition to secondary school. *Revolution of The Rise* culminated in a final spectacular performance devised and performed by the students themselves. The students worked in film, music and circus to create a performance that celebrated the end of their primary years and their progression to high school the following year.

### *Major challenges*

The major challenge in 2015 was lack of funding for the project. As a result, the project:

- took place over a much shorter time frame, with less time for student input in the development of performance concepts.
- involved fewer artists and including only limited technical and production support.
- worked with fewer production resources.

### *Key outcome/s*

- The children were very positive about the program overall (they loved it) and would definitely do it again if the opportunity arose.
- The classroom teacher witnessed an increased maturity throughout the process.
- Teachers recognised and appreciated Polyglot's work with the students as falling outside of the normal routine and classroom process and noted that it provided an insight into a different way of children working with adults.

"Especially two years ago we did a lot of our stuff down at Monterey (Revolution of the Rise) so I think that eased the transition in a big way for a lot of students who were a bit nervous about going there... It's definitely helped them feel a lot more at ease with some of the teachers, some of the drama teachers or music. Using their facilities, it's definitely made a difference."

**- Michael Shanks, Grade 5/6 Teacher, Mahogany Rise Primary School, 2015**



## Outer Bounds – 2016

**Artistic Director: Kate Kantor**

**Participants: Year 6 Mahogany Rise PS; Year 7 Monterey SC.**



### *Remembering the project*

"Last year we were up in the flora and fauna reserve and towards the end of the project... some of the students were given different responsibilities. Some of them were Rangers and they had to lead the parents and anyone who wanted to come and see the production on the night through The Pines forest when it was dark, it was raining a bit, it wasn't the greatest conditions but they were able to walk through and show different plants, what they were, what they could be used for, for healing products or for eating... Seeing how the confidence of some of these students had grown and all of a sudden they had developed leadership skills, which I guess it was happening anyway but it was just pushed that much further with the Polyglot program. And once they'd realised they could do it, they have a big smile on their face, they feel more confident and they can try new things they wouldn't have tried otherwise."

**- Student, Year 8, remembering Outer Bounds when they were in Grade 6**

### *Description of the project*

The 2016 residency, under the direction of Polyglot's Kate Kantor, brought on artist Tanja Beer and Ranger Richard Faulkner as key creative partners. The focus was on nature, the environment and experiencing the outdoors. *Outer Bounds* was about students spending time in The Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve, a 108 hectare reserve set in amongst suburban Frankston. The intention of the project was for the children to connect with the place and feel a sense of ownership and stewardship of The Pines and the natural world, and to want to return there after the project ended.

In the culminating performance, Student Rangers guided parents, family and community members through The Pines and shared with them their new knowledge about the local flora and fauna. Monterey Secondary College students documented the project through observation, note-taking and film making.

**Major challenges**

- Working in a new and unfamiliar environment.
- Bringing together art-making and environmental education.
- Many children were unused to spending time in nature and were initially resistant.

**Key outcome/s**

For students:

- Improvement in socio-emotional skills. Students spoke of 'getting out of their comfort zone', of resolving conflict and of developing confidence in their own abilities.
- Increased engagement through taking on leadership roles and responsibility for the performance.
- Enhanced confidence in creativity and abilities.
- Improvement in social cohesion/inclusion. Students worked collaboratively in teams and overcame the challenge that this presented.

"Polyglot's not at all like school because we were outside and experiencing fun things, but we learnt lots about nature and animals. It's going to be boring now sitting doing work in school."

**- Year 5/6 Student, 2016**

## Altogether – 2017

**Artistic Director: Sue Giles**

**Participants: Year 5/6 MRPS**



(Altogether, 2017. Image Credit Theresa Harrison)

### ***Remembering the project***

"...we set up a scenario, the lights went down... the phones came out, with the phone lights, and the sound was in there, and Wilson was packing sound in, and the kids were choosing the sound for the moment, it had to be spooky, they were doing all the DJ-ing, and that's when everybody around it understood the theatre of it, and it was so great, because then we could go, okay, we need music for the cocoon being, and the kids would go off and make it, because they knew exactly the feeling that they needed..."

**- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, remembering Altogether, 2017**

### ***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 to explore the idea of transition, identities and secret worlds. The team consisted of five artists including a Director 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. Building on the visual metaphor of cocoons, which were created using brown paper and masking tape, the Year 5/6s collaborated with a filmmaker to create a short film in which they conceived of the scenes and composed and performed the musical score.

In the culminating 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.



**Major challenges**

- 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.

**Key outcome/s**

- 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.
- 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.
- The building of relationships and the creation of a 'safe space' were fundamental building blocks to the successful outcomes of this project.

"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, Artist, Polyglot Theatre, Altogether, 2017**

## LONGITUDINAL EVALUATION

### METHODOLOGY

This evaluation has taken an ethnographic approach to the consideration of impacts and implications over a sustained period of time. By seeking to understand the lived experience of participants through interviews and written documentation of past events, it has been the intention of the evaluation to identify impacts on individuals and groups who have participated in this program. In addition to interviews and observations of practice, the evaluation has drawn on documents, raw data collected in previous years and creative artefacts which provide evidence of impact and changes over time.

The project goals and indicators of impact set out below represent overarching goals identified by Polyglot at the outset and have been used to construct an evaluative framework against which impacts and other outcomes have been measured.

#### *Literature as touchstones for evaluation*

Over the course of the past seven years, the project evaluations have been informed by relevant literature in the areas of arts partnerships, arts education, community arts and current models of evaluation in community settings. These continue to provide important touchstones for the analysis that has been undertaken. (A list of relevant references has been included at the conclusion of the report).

In the 2012 evaluation of *Knock, Knock!* Evaluator Dr Ricci-Jane Adams drew on the seminal work of Mary Ann Hunter who had undertaken a study of six arts partnerships in schools between 2001-2005. In Hunter's report, *Education and the Arts Research Overview*, she provided a summary of attributes of effective arts partnerships. Adams drew on these findings in her analysis of *Knock, Knock!* and in subsequent Mahogany Rise projects. Hunter identifies the following attributes of effective arts partnerships programs as including:

- student-centred learning,
- administrative support,
- integrated professional development,
- positive learning environment,
- an integrated program,
- 'authentic' learning,
- exposure to the diversity of the arts,
- positive role models,
- program transparency and flexibility,
- recognition of cultural difference,
- continuity and sustainability, and
- artists as effective partners<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ampag.com.au/wapap/Campaign/2-education/EducationAndTheArtsResearchOverview.pdf>

Adams found these attributes resonated with the Polyglot residencies and were useful in benchmarking national best practice.

The connection between the formal school curriculum and the informal learning experienced by children through their Polyglot collaborations has also been canvassed in a number of project evaluations and continues to be relevant in this longitudinal report. Adams first invoked the 2010 ACER report by leading Australian arts educator Robyn Ewing<sup>4</sup> in the 2012 *Knock, Knock!* evaluation. In her highly influential paper, *The Arts and Australian Education*, Ewing draws attention to a somewhat fraught relationship between arts and education, suggesting that the emphasis on ‘high stakes literacy and numeracy testing’ is one factor which contributes to an ambivalence about the place of arts in education. Ewing argues for collaborative arts practices across disciplines, ‘based on purpose rather than constrained by separate discipline practices’, and states that the arts can ‘...illuminate the advantages of viewing the world from multiple perspectives’.

This report has also been informed by other key literature regarding the nature, practice and evaluation of arts partnerships in schools and community. For international benchmarking, work which has emerged from the UK’s Creative Partnerships has been highly influential, bringing together a decade of sustained practice and research into creative collaborations between artists and young people<sup>5</sup>. At a local level, Arts Victoria has published a number of key reports into the role of artists working in schools. Research funded by Arts Victoria (now Creative Victoria) and the Victorian Education Department has impacted on policy, particularly in relation to the Extended School Residencies, a critical component of the Polyglot - Mahogany Rise collaboration. (Imms et al, 2011; Effective Change PL, 2002)

## DATA SOURCES

The following sources of data were accessed for this evaluation.

### Historical Sources

- Evaluation Reports from 2011-2017.
- Creative artefacts from 2011-2017 (film, images, drawing, writing).
- Interviews.
- Website documentation – Polyglot, Mahogany Rise PS.

### Contemporaneous sources

Interviews (2016-2017)

- Polyglot Staff.
- Artists.
- Principal.
- Teachers.
- Students.
- Community Liaison Worker.
- Voice Lab data.
- Observations at Mahogany Rise PS (Evaluator’s journal).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/AER-58.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> As Creative Partnerships is no longer in existence, an archive of reports and research can be accessed at <https://archive.is/20131017205459/http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/tag/research>

## ANALYSIS

### Goals (Impact Indicators)

Analysis has been informed by the relevant literature, as discussed above. The analysis has focused explicitly on a consideration of the Goals determined by Polyglot and the impact indicators formulated prior to the evaluation, as follows:

#### 1. PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What is Polyglot Theatre's process of community engagement in the education setting? How has this developed or changed over the course of the longitudinal partnership with MRPS?

#### 2. SOCIAL IMPACT

What is the social impact of Polyglot's education partnerships for the children involved? Social impact priorities for this project over time have included:

- a. Improve kids' socio-emotional skills.
- b. Increase kids' engagement and success at school.
- c. Develop kids' confidence in their creativity and abilities.
- d. Improve kids' social cohesion/inclusion.
- e. Increase community awareness of kids' creative capacities and the effectiveness of an arts project in schools.

#### 3. NEXUS BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL ARTS AND EDUCATION?

What is Polyglot's nexus between the professional arts and education?

What has been the impact for Key stakeholders on their practice and professional development? Key stakeholders include:

- a) Polyglot's professional artists,
- b) School principals,
- c) Classroom teachers.

A key factor in the evaluation has been to identify evidence of change or evolution over time. However the evaluation has also sought to crystallise patterns within the practice and the responses to that practice, and to offer an analysis of how these broader findings are also critical to an understanding of this long-term project.

Key Findings are discussed in detail in the following section and are followed, in the conclusion with a set of recommendations.

## DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

### OVERVIEW – THE LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

“A lot of the trusts and philanthropics are more focused on community, which still believe that school is the Department of Education’s responsibility, so there’s a conflict there... people feel that somebody else should be taking care of schools, and I would say that... [the] Education Department should... have much more money, and they should be taking care of schools, and putting arts as the basis of the curriculum as well. Put that back in!”

- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017

This longitudinal evaluation addresses a set of specific impact indicators relating to key goals identified and pursued by Polyglot over the past seven years.

Beyond the specific impact indicators, there are three areas of interest that have emerged in the evaluation which warrant further attention. These are: funding, the impact of incremental change, and transition as a thematic driver of the partnership.

#### Funding and how it shapes the project

**Key Finding 1:** Sustainable and substantial funding sources are essential for multi-year extended school residencies to consistently achieve high quality, process driven artistic and socio-emotional outcomes for participants, which then accrue over time.

It is self-evident that funding is a critical factor for all creative partnerships in schools, and extended residencies are especially demanding in terms of funds. The model of practice that Polyglot employs in their extended residences is expensive in terms of human and material resources – teams of artists providing a multi-arts experience over several weeks or even months to a relatively small number of participants; provision of production and logistic support; and the commitment to high aesthetic qualities in arts-based processes and outcomes. However, it has been demonstrated repeatedly that it is precisely this model of practice which contributes to the plethora of positive outcomes to emerge from each project. Polyglot as a company is adept at formulating a compelling argument for the limited funds available in this arena, although mounting the argument in an annual funding round is another cost to the company.

Analysis of the seven projects in this evaluation has revealed however, that the dependence on a fragile and potentially capricious funding marketplace can be a risk to the integrity of project design and implementation. Unpredictable and variable funding can impact on the capacity of program planners to build projects based on the philosophical and artistic ideals of the company. For example, the 2015 project *Revolution of the Rise* had no external funding. The two week program succeeded in maintaining Polyglot’s presence at the school and providing a project which many participants enjoyed, but was not able to support a child-led exploratory process and the high-end production values characteristic of other residencies where funding was more substantial and predictable.

"Yes, so, when I first started at Mahogany Rise... it was well funded... that meant that we were in a good position to employ enough artists, and have enough money for materials, and that was great. But, as the years went on, it became trickier to get enough money to really... the main thing is to have enough artists, because I feel like that is one of the significant factors in making these kind of residencies work well, is that connection, the ability to connect with kids, and so, you can just connect better when you've got more people."

**- Kate Kantor, Director Kids' Collaborations, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017**

**The power of incremental change (*We're here today, we're here next year, we were here last year*)**

**Excerpt from 2013 Evaluation report – Grit**

*According to both Kate Kantor and Sarah Whymark, the children from the previous year's residency were very quick to get out of their comfort zones. They had relationships with Kate and project manager Lis and they quickly formed relationships with others. They were very useful in modeling the types of expectations. In addition, these students had an observable increased understanding of the skills needed 'to make art and to work with people in a cooperative, appreciative manner' according to Kate.*

*Other teachers in the school were also excited to have Polyglot back having been through the process before. There was far less wariness about the sorts of the disruptions, loss of enthusiasm and people were constantly asking Sarah about it. According to Sarah, it was 'a much easier ride – I understood the process and knew what was expected of me'.*

*Kate Kantor believes that the self-directed creative contribution from the students who had previously worked with Polyglot is evidence of the advantage of prior knowledge. Confirming this, one student who had participated in 2012 stated on discovering that Polyglot was returning that 'I was really excited and excited to learn more things' and 'I want to do drama the most because I don't really like it and I want to get better at it'. Kate observed that some of these students were better able to work without help from an adult, and assisted in organising and making sure other students were heard.*

As suggested earlier in this report, Polyglot is much more than a theatre company to the children and staff at Mahogany Rise. It is a catch-all which describes a particular kind of experience – fun, chaotic, creative, an escape from day to day routine. For Keery Gibson, Community Engagement worker, the sight of the Polyglot van in the car park sparks an anticipatory thrill – 'Polyglot is here'.

"When Polyglot come to town... [they] bring with them this energy... to the school. Everybody is impacted by that energy. Everybody feels that energy and it kind of lifts the day... runs through the staff room, the corridors. It's just a great place to be when Polyglot comes in."

**- Keery Gibson, Community Engagement worker, Frankston North Schools Consortia, Interview 2017**

The reflections of students and staff who were interviewed for this evaluation reveal variations on this theme – that Polyglot is not just one definable entity but a collection of impressions, memories and experiences. These encounters have contributed to the incremental cultural change that Polyglot has brought to Mahogany Rise.

By returning each year, Polyglot staff also benefitted from the acquisition of institutional knowledge as part of the Mahogany Rise school year. Logistics were managed well in advance – there was clarity about who to talk to, how and when it was convenient to contact busy classroom teachers, what was flexible in the schedule and what needed to be worked around. As a result, the overall management of the project, and the all-important liaison with staff became more streamlined over time as a shorthand was established. While each project provided the school with moments of insight about how the arts could engage the children and enhance their experience of school, the repeated visits for an entire generation of Mahogany Rise students also contributed to the shared understanding of what Polyglot brought to the school. The importance of stable school leadership in this incremental accrual of institutional knowledge cannot be understated. The principal, John Culley was the key broker of all negotiations between Polyglot and the staff, also advocate and leader when enlisting staff to his vision for an arts-rich culture at Mahogany Rise.

"You almost have to live through the experience to actually understand the process, and then you go, oh, okay, and so when you've done it, over, however many years, five, six, I always know that there'll be an outcome which will have changed the nature of some kids' understanding about themselves, about the world around them, and about their ability to create, and that's always going to be the outcome.

"I think the teachers may not express it in that way... but I think they have a different appreciation of how arts can be the secret to education, and that, to me, is what that marriage is about, so that it is actually giving people that opportunity to expand their horizons, and I think that for each of the teachers that have been involved in the project, that's always been the case."

**- John Culley, Principal, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Interview 2017**

## Transition

**Key Finding 2:** Polyglot residencies contributed to the Mahogany Rise transition program by building resilience, demystifying secondary school as a place and an institution and by allowing students to creatively explore transition related fears and thoughts.

"John was particularly interested in this idea of resilience, and especially around transition, and we were very interested in transition because metaphorically, it gave us a lot of scope, this idea of rites of passage, doorways into things, of portals."

**- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017**

Beginning with *Knock, Knock!* in 2013 the theme of transition underscored the creative development of each Mahogany Rise - Polyglot collaboration. More specifically the theme of transition to high school became an underlying principle for each creative development process. However, each collaboration allowed for the exploration of more universal themes – e.g. resilience (grit), identity, living with nature and secret worlds was embedded in both practical and artistic aspects of any given project.

Each of the project evaluations considered how transition had been addressed and reviewed the strategies that had been implemented in a given project as to their efficacy in building resilience and either directly or indirectly supporting moments of transition the children were about to face. Consistently, the evaluation reports noted that the students' transition to secondary school had been supported and eased by their experience with the Polyglot project.

In keeping with the incremental and less visible impacts of Polyglot's long-term presence at Mahogany Rise, the wider school community was also impacted by Polyglot's attention to transition, and this impact accrued over time. Community Engagement worker, Keery Gibson observed: '*Not only do our students transition... it's also our families that transition*'. When Polyglot creates a pathway for the Year 6's from their primary school to high school, the

family is witness and co-participant. Polyglot events brought parents and carers into the school in a supportive and non-threatening way, and allowed family members to engage with the issues that their children were exploring through Polyglot. Gibson notes the flow-on effect of 'doing Polyglot' when they take part in the community celebration of their graduation:

"I think that students that have done Polyglot, their graduation is a really big part of their transition... there is an expectation around that. Each student gives a bit of a speech. I feel that Polyglot and all the activities that belong within that program. Those things give students those skills to be able to do that – and it's a scary thing... because by then, by graduation, Polyglot has left the building."

- Keery Gibson, Community Engagement worker, Frankston North Schools Consortia, Interview 2017





## 1. PROCESS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

***What is Polyglot Theatre's process of community engagement in the education setting? How has this developed or changed over the course of the longitudinal partnership with Mahogany Rise Primary School?***

"My observations were, that for some of our families, being engaged with the school – and engagement and involvement are two different things – being engaged with the school – it might feel quite uncomfortable. This was an activity that brought them in and there were a number of reasons why that happened. One is, their children or child will be taking part in this fantastic, wonderful, marvellously magical program and they'd be going home and telling them about it, so there was this buy in."

**- Keery Gibson, Community Engagement worker, Frankston North Schools Consortia, Interview 2017**

Polyglot's process of community engagement takes on two distinct but inter-related practices. These two distinct practices can be described as:

- i) Brokerage, and
- ii) Immersion

### **i) Brokerage**

Each time Polyglot returns to Frankston North and to Mahogany Rise, they enter into a process of negotiation with the key stakeholders within the community, and by implication, those working for the community (specifically funding agencies). With successful negotiation, these key stakeholders provide support to the program but, it should be noted, also hold it accountable.

This Brokerage phase of community engagement largely operates at a formal, organisational level, for example, theatre company to school; theatre company to philanthropic agency. However, this longitudinal evaluation has identified the critical importance of personal relationships, the building of trust and respect, and the awareness of the human dimensions underlying each stakeholder role within the community, to successful and sustained community engagement in this project.

The most striking example of this is the relationship between the leaders of the two key organisations: Polyglot and Mahogany Rise. Sue Giles and John Culley were the initiators of the partnership and both recognised a shared appreciation of the capacity for the arts to bring about positive change in the lives of vulnerable young people. In a project where both organisations have had to negotiate many variables in each year of the partnership, the stable presence of these two key leaders throughout has been highly significant. It has allowed institutional knowledge of the other organisation to build, and it has provided for a streamlined Brokerage phase of community engagement in the later years of the project. The consistent presence of Kids' Collaborations director Kate Kantor over a number of years has also contributed to this stability.

Figure 1. below identifies the key stakeholders in the Brokerage phase of community engagement.

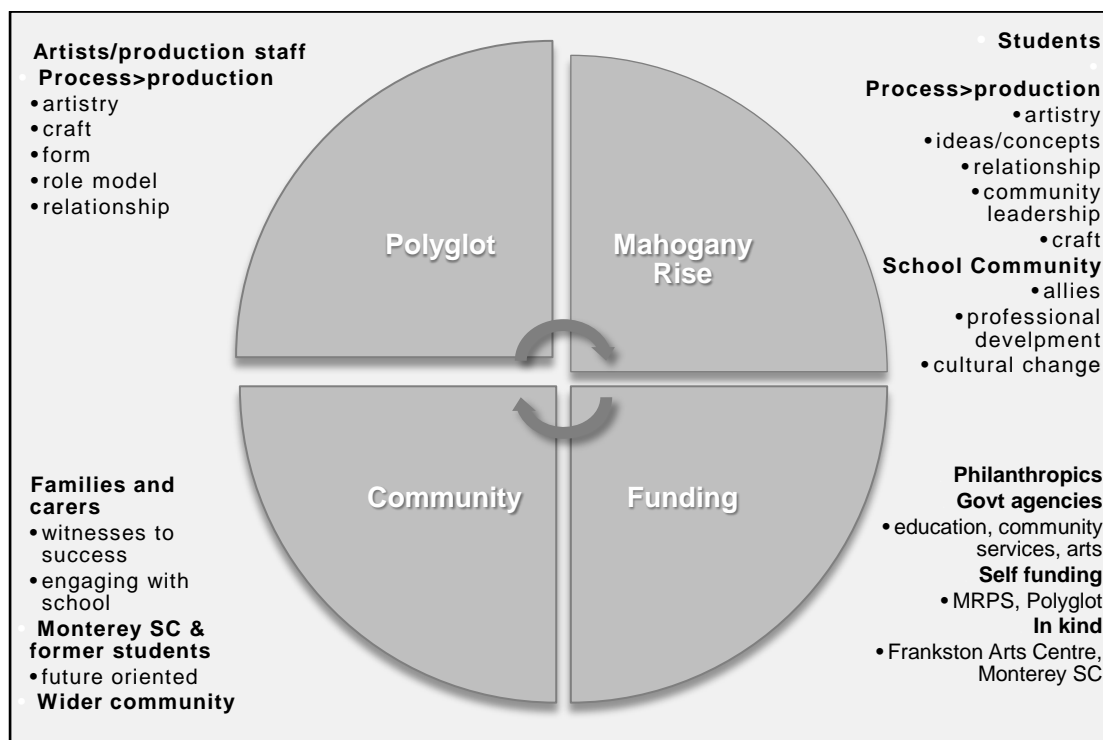


Figure 1. Community Engagement: Key Stakeholders

In summary, the core tasks undertaken in this Brokerage phase of community engagement are as follows:

- Relationship building – who are we, what is our role in this creative arts partnership and what do we bring to it?
- Building an organisational infrastructure - how can our project fit within your organisation for a period of time?
- Cultural exchange - children and the arts at the heart of the enterprise. How can Polyglot assist teachers and the school community in accommodating this infusion of a different way of doing, being and learning within the classroom? (eg. Professional Development, Memorandum of Understanding, teacher briefings, principal as broker)
- Community sharing – how can this work be shared with the school community and the wider community?

"I think there's been moments when parents have been really proud of their kids, and it may be the only time in their lives that the kid would have felt like their parents were proud of them, because of what they'd done, whether it's been partly their little performing piece or it's been just participating in a way that can be seen, and that's visually there."

**- John Culley, Principal, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Interview 2017**

## **ii) Immersion**

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.

### **- The Polyglot Process**

Immersion, the second community engagement practice, sits at the very heart of Polyglot's school based arts partnership. It takes place when the Polyglot team seeks to engage with the community of young people who will be their collaborators in their residency. Throughout the seven years of collaboration with Mahogany Rise, Polyglot has successfully facilitated the building of a community of art-makers. In this community, over time, the children become instigators, artists and project leaders, while the Polyglot team both create the space for this to happen and share that space with their co-artists. The classroom teacher is pivotal to the Immersion phase, as Polyglot ally, supporter and facilitator of the children's engagement and potentially a co-artist. When the classroom teacher is unable to or chooses not to take on this role as ally, it is much more difficult for Polyglot to move into this immersive phase of community engagement with the children.

The Immersion phase requires a skilful and sophisticated manipulation of elements, made even more complex because at its best it appears seamless and spontaneous to the outside eye. These elements (indicated on Figure 1) include:

- artistry and artisanship (mastery of art form and craft),
- relationships,
- role models of artist, explorer and player, and
- artistic pedagogy.

This final element may seem at odds with Polyglot's emphasis on experiencing and exploring artistic practices rather than 'teaching' them. There is compelling evidence throughout the Polyglot-Mahogany Rise partnership, however, that the participants have acquired new knowledge and skills, have progressed in their socio-emotional and cognitive capacities and have applied newly acquired understandings to new and unfamiliar contexts. All of this is evidence of learning, and by implication, a pedagogical practice.

Principal John Culley describes the artists working with children in this way:

"Kids can be pretty quick to (a) get engaged, and (b), disengage, and so, often it was about how much disengagement would have happened, and with some kids that happened, but then, it was about how they were re-engaged back in, and that's the other part about working with the artists that Polyglot provide, that their ability to be able to stretch themselves above and beyond to actually make it work with those individual kids that are quite difficult and complex, and you know, artists are artists, and they want to be happy with the product they're producing, and all that sort of stuff, but in these sort of environments, you need to have that relational work happening in a way that it's costly..."

**- John Culley, Principal, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Interview 2017**

### **Measuring impacts/change**

The evaluation has determined that community engagement strategies have followed similar principles throughout the Polyglot-Mahogany Rise partnership. The efficacy of these strategies has been impacted by the influence of variables – such as changes in funding, changes in teaching staff, new operational guidelines or structures in the school setting, or in response to the settings for workshops and public performances (Community Hall, Frankston Arts Centre, Mahogany Rise PS, Monterey S.C.)

Three key findings have emerged from an analysis of this Impact indicator:

**Key Finding 3:** The implementation of Polyglot's strategies for community engagement invited buy-in from key stakeholders. For example,

- i) preliminary briefings with staff prior to commencement of the program allowed for organisational, conceptual and pastoral input from the classroom teacher and at best, formalised their role in the partnership between school and theatre company.
- ii) a culminating performance event brought families into the school at the invitation of their children, in a non-threatening and celebratory way.

**Key Finding 4:** When it is not possible to achieve the engagement of a key community stakeholder, the outcomes of the program can be diminished.

**Key Finding 5:** Community engagement builds incrementally, from year to year in a long-term partnership and positively contributes to an environment in which cultural change in the school community is possible.

## 2. SOCIAL IMPACT

***What is the social impact of Polyglot's education partnerships for the children involved? Social impact priorities for this project over time have included:***

- Improve kids' socio-emotional skills.
- Increase kids' engagement and success at school.
- Develop kids' confidence in their creativity and abilities.
- Improve kids' social cohesion/inclusion.
- Increase community awareness of kids' creative capacities and the effectiveness of an arts project in schools.

### **Social impacts of long-term Polyglot residencies**

"We completely understand and got the fact that a longer time in one school is much more effective than a single workshop, for the wellbeing of those kids, and then you go, well, okay, that's like two months in a year, what would happen if it was more than that, and why would you leave a place if you were already having a good effect, and you had a good relationship, wouldn't it be great to do it again, and again, and again."

**- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017**

"Well, Polyglot, it teaches you a lot, like joining in isn't the worst thing to do and, working in a team is probably one of the best ways to get stuff done. Polyglot does teach you a lot of other lessons as well, like, it's not just about one person being on stage, it's about everyone joining together and making something really fun..."

**- Student, Year 7, remembering Polyglot, Interview 2016**

The five social impact goals have driven planning and evaluation throughout the seven year period of collaboration, and consistently, some, if not all of these goals have been met each year. Through the process of evaluating each Polyglot project, much has been learned about how the achievement of these goals has impacted on participants, and about tangible outcomes that have emerged. In contrast to the goals related to community engagement, there is less evidence of long-term impacts on children. In most instances, children have an immersive, sustained Polyglot experience just once, or perhaps twice in their school life so long-term impacts are more difficult to measure and less likely to occur.

The long-term impacts which have been identified through this evaluation relate to the Polyglot process itself and how it has been calibrated each year to respond to the needs of the participating group, the skills of the participating artists, and the chosen focus of the project. The importance of the commitment to program evaluation cannot be understated here. Each year an external evaluator has provided Polyglot staff with evidence of outcomes, shortcomings and potentialities of each project and this has stimulated a reflexive process of review and renewal amongst Polyglot staff: recommendations are considered and incorporated in the following year, and critique is used as a prompt for greater refinements of the Polyglot process. This reflexivity is also in evidence throughout each residency. The 90 minute journey to and from Frankston in the Polyglot van is used as an opportunity to plan, debrief, reflect and review, and this discussion is captured in planning notes and the weekly production report.

**Key Finding 6:** Polyglot's commitment to reflection and review during and after their residencies contributed to refinements in practice, and more effective workshop implementation and artist collaborations.

"The good and bad thing about working in Frankston is that it's a long drive there and back so we'd have a lot of time to discuss ideas and concepts on the drive there and see what happened and then discuss ideas and concepts on the drive back, sort of, process what happened and how to approach the next thing ... We all had our specific roles but it was very organic and it was very collaborative and it was a very exciting process because every time an idea came up, we'd ask 'how are we going to do that?' "

- Jason Heller, Filmmaker 2013-2017, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017

### **The Polyglot Process: the pursuit of hard fun**

Since 2011, the project evaluations have highlighted the qualities of the Polyglot approach to working with children and have provided evidence of how this approach has contributed to the achievement of project goals. Clearly, different artists and contexts have revealed success in different aspects of the project implementation. The following six qualities have been identified as characteristic of the Polyglot way of working and have recurred repeatedly over time, often as a result of the reflective processes referred to above.

- Creating a safe space – this is an overarching quality and can be seen as a precondition for creative risk-taking and the emergence of children as project leaders.
- Relational space – conversation and exchange is highly valued inside the workshop space. Forming relationships is the cornerstone to the safe space, to creative risk taking and to building of mutual respect between adults and children.
- Optimism - the culture of 'yes'. Many children enter the workshop space with uncertainty and a fear of failure. Their encounter with non-judgmental acceptance of themselves as individuals, and their ideas, no matter how outlandish, as valid, promotes openness and a willingness to explore uncharted territories in art and ideas.
- A democratic, child-led workshop space – the workshop space is open and artists enter with starting points rather than structured plans. Finding ways to ensure that children speak and can be heard when formulating ideas and making work is a key challenge for the artists.
- Varied art forms and artistic practice – the ideal model for the Polyglot process is a team of artists of different backgrounds, offering different artistic encounters to children. This gives children multiple entry points into the project and the opportunity to encounter a range of art forms and arts explorations. This long-term program has revealed that some art forms have served this approach to working with children better than others. For example, dance; costume, puppetry and design; installation, music and film making have all had particular resonance for the children in different projects and have provided accessible and pliable forums for many children.
- **Hard fun** – the Polyglot process begins with fun and playful encounters through games, drawing and art-making. Artists and children play together and with joy. Fun is encouraged and sought out, but it is also the conduit to challenge, failure and trying something new. As resilience and confidence build, playful fun transforms into hard fun – refining an artwork, rehearsing a dance, learning a new skill, repeating a failed enterprise, working in a new group, giving up a precious idea for the sake of a better one.

### **Social goals**

**Key Finding 6:** Polyglot's child-led approach in their residencies at Mahogany Rise has played a key role in the consistent achievement of the five key social goals identified at the outset of the seven-year partnership.

The table below illustrates the relationship between the Polyglot process of working with children and the achievement of specific outcomes related to the five key social goals. These outcomes have been identified in the analysis of data over the period 2011-2017 as representative of the many impacts that the program has had on children. It should also be noted that a number of these qualities correlate with the acquisition of the 'general capabilities' as identified by ACARA<sup>6</sup> in the Australian Curriculum. Many of the students participating in Polyglot programs have demonstrated evidence of improvements in at least two of the seven capabilities: *Critical and creative thinking* and *Personal and social capability*, with potential impacts also on *Literacy and Numeracy* (although these latter have not been measured in past evaluations).

Polyglot process with children	Social impact priorities	Impacts on children
<b>safe space</b>  <b>relational</b>  <b>optimism - the culture of 'yes'</b>  <b>a democratic workshop space</b>  <b>varied art forms &amp; artistic practice</b>  <b>hard fun</b>	socio-emotional skills	confidence
		robust problem-solving
	kids' engagement and success at school	enhanced capacities in literacy, numeracy and expressive skills
		creative risk taking
	confidence in creativity and abilities	leadership
		skills in collaboration
	social cohesion and inclusion	tolerance and inclusivity
		families as witness to success
	community awareness of kids' capacities	incremental cultural change

Table 1: Social Impacts of Polyglot

**Key Finding 7:** The long-term evaluation of the Polyglot-Mahogany Rise partnership provides evidence that the Polyglot approach to arts residencies in the primary school context contributes to the development of several of the general capabilities identified as core to learning in the Australian curriculum.

While there is compelling evidence of the effectiveness of the Polyglot process in the achievement of key social goals for children, the evaluation reveals some limitations to the partnership's capacity to effect long term change.

<sup>6</sup> ACARA-Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority  
<http://v7-5.australiancurriculum.edu.au/generalcapabilities/overview/general-capabilities-in-the-australian-curriculum>

For instance, there is little evidence to suggest that many children continue or take up arts practice after the conclusion of the Polyglot program, unless it is provided in the school context. Also, although there is evidence that resilience and increased confidence with respect to transition to secondary school is further developed through the Polyglot experience, there is little evidence that students' exposure to high school allows them to capitalise on what they have learned through Polyglot in the more highly structured environment of the secondary school.

It should also be acknowledged that these impacts do not reach all children. Some children struggle to find a point of entry into the project, despite the best efforts of the Polyglot team and their teacher, and some find the lack of structure and the unpredictability daunting.

"It's putting kids outside their comfort zone, because Polyglot come in with a bit of an idea but the kids have got to create a lot of what happens and they have a big say in how it works. I think to give them that freedom and that responsibility, that's hard for some of them."

**- Michael Shanks, Grade 5/6 Teacher, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Interview 2017**



### 3. NEXUS BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL ARTS AND EDUCATION?

#### *What is Polyglot's nexus between the professional arts and education?*

What has been the impact for Key stakeholders on their practice and professional development? Key stakeholders include:

- Polyglot's professional artists,
- School Principals,
- Classroom teachers.

#### **The education paradox**

"Some love it and thrive on it, but we constantly do this at Polyglot, as well, the people who can work in this process with kids are rare birds. I think they do... a lot of artists have their own practice, well, we all do, we have our own practice, very firmly in place, and what we're asking of artists is to allow that to break apart, and to allow that to be shifted, and for some it doesn't work that way, and there's a pretence of that, and sometimes there's no pretence at all, and so you really, choosing teams is the best work in the world, I reckon, because if you get the right people together, magic does happen."

**- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017**

This evaluation has identified evidence of the powerful learning that children experience when they 'do Polyglot', and it has also proposed that Polyglot artists have been highly effective educators in the school environment over the past seven years. Paradoxically, much of this learning has been achieved because it doesn't look like 'learning' and the pedagogical role that artists have taken on is successful because it doesn't look like 'teaching'. Rather, a safe, non-judgmental space has been created and through juxtapositions of fun, artistry and challenge, children have discovered new knowledge and developed new skills, and artists, as their collaborators in this quest have been their guides and mentors. In other words, in the nexus between professional arts and education, Polyglot has carved out a niche in which children as playful, inquisitive and resilient artists also become playful, inquisitive, resilient learners.

Over time, Polyglot as an organisation has developed and refined its approach to working with children. This has been in evidence at Mahogany Rise. Observers and artists alike comment on the miraculous way that the seeming chaos of preliminary workshops invariably gives way to shape and structure in the creation of an artwork, installation or performance event over the duration of the residency. This is not miraculous however. It is the Polyglot process at work and the transformation takes place because it is being guided by the experienced, highly skilled and talented arts professionals who direct each of the residencies (Kate Kantor, Sue Giles). The long-term partnership between Polyglot and Mahogany Rise has been challenging and invigorating for artists and education staff alike. Many have loved the experience and describe how it has enriched their practice. Some artists have committed to returning year after year to work with the students of Mahogany Rise. For others – teachers and artists alike – the fit is not ideal and they have opted out. The attached table represents the professional arts - education nexus and draws on longitudinal data to identify some support strategies which may be of use to key stakeholders when they inhabit the territory between arts and education.

Four significant findings have emerged through the consideration of impacts on artists and educators and these are discussed below. This section concludes with a discussion of the Polyglot legacy at Mahogany Rise - a new professional arts-education nexus in the form of a creative arts program run by staff within the school.

## Artists

### ***An open process may look effortless but isn't.***

The analysis of data from 2011-2017 reveals the important role that highly skilled professional artists play in the successful achievement of project goals. It also suggests that some artists are better suited to the Polyglot approach to working with children in school settings than others. Artists who have thrived in the Polyglot-Mahogany Rise partnership appear to share a number of characteristics. These include:

- collaborative approaches to art making and planning,
- experience and appreciation of working with children or in community settings (or openness to this context),
- willingness to 'go with the flow',
- good interpersonal skills (for relationship building), and
- a capacity to be reactive and responsive in the moment.

For those artists who have led Polyglot residencies, in addition to the above characteristics, the capacity to mentor others and to instinctively recognise the artistic or creative potential of children's ideas are fundamental. Unlike some of the above characteristics, which can be nurtured or even taught, it appears that this 'framing' capacity is intuitive but can further develop with experience. Both Kate Kantor and Sue Giles are experienced theatre makers and have drawn heavily on this intuitive, yet sophisticated talent in the crafting of the Polyglot projects. As this is the most nebulous, yet pivotal capacity that each project leader needs, the question of how it can be passed on, or how future project leaders can be nurtured requires further consideration.

"...it was fantastic to get back on the ground, but... it was a real wakeup, because it's a really hard task, and it was hard and really engaging, and you're working with 28 participants, not to mention teachers and staff, but 28 participants who all have an incredible variety of needs and desires and energies, and every single one of them is so interesting on their own footing...

"But I was actually really excited by the ideas that came up, and... I loved seeing a whole bunch of imagery and then going, 'oh, this all looks like it will make something beautiful together'. And pulling in the metaphors and pulling in the links around it, is something I really love to do."

**- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017**

**Key Finding 8:** Implementing the Polyglot process of working with children requires:

- highly skilled professional artists who have the capacity to work collaboratively and respectfully with children and other artists,
- strong and intuitive artistic leadership, and
- logistic and practical support from skilled production staff.

## Teachers

### ***Polyglot is not for everyone***

One of the ongoing tensions through the length of the partnership program has been the capacity of Polyglot and the school leadership to bring teachers into the process. This was highly successful on many occasions with participating teachers reporting how much they learned from the Polyglot team about creative practices and about how their children responded to different ways to doing and being in the classroom. Some were inspired to learn more about the arts and some resolved to change some of their own classroom

practices. The greatest impact has been on Nathan Wilson, the Education Support worker who participated in a number of Polyglot residencies and in 2017 became part of the Polyglot team of artists for *Altogether*. Beginning in 2017, John Culley has engaged Nathan to lead a pilot performing arts program in the school.

On the occasions when a classroom teacher did not 'buy-in' to the Polyglot process, the program and the outcomes for children were diminished. For some teachers, the disruption to routine and the apparent chaos of a classroom without an obvious leader was disturbing. For some teachers, the purpose and intentions of the workshops were not clear, and they were concerned that their students were behaving inappropriately in a school setting. While attempts were made to orient the teachers to the workshop process and its potential to galvanise students, this was of limited effectiveness.

Teachers are not necessarily predisposed to more professional development programs in an already busy schedule and a crowded curriculum. Some teachers co-operated because they were asked to by the principal, but consistently, those who found the workshops alienating or threatening to their sense of order in the classroom, were not able to fully participate. At its worst, this translated into resistance and at best, passive compliance. Those teachers who did embrace the program were not necessarily those with an arts background but those teachers who were able to suspend judgment and relinquish control within their classroom.

"The teachers, we've had a whole stack of variations on that, and from people who have just not coped with it... it's because of the process that we undergo, which is about the child-led activity, and this is almost like the Polyglot process is the antithesis of the school process in a lot of ways. We're not about teaching, we're about learning from the kids, if you like, so, that kind of turnaround can look like chaos, can look like completely shambolic, can be completely alarming. It can also upset a whole bunch of behavioural stuff that's been set up. We can upset routines, and so the negotiation in that space is super, super important... although we try really hard..."

**- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017**

**Key Finding 9:** A productive, respectful partnership between the classroom teacher and Polyglot artists is central to the management of the project and contributes to its ultimate success. Classroom teachers who are open to handing over their classroom to professional arts colleagues and to active participation in the workshops gain most from the experience for themselves and their students.

### **The principal paradox**

While John Culley was actively involved in the setting up of the Polyglot-Mahogany Rise partnership, he has not been 'hands on' with the projects when they are running at his school. He is however, a key figure within the arts-education nexus. He is ally, broker, facilitator and arbitrator, the ultimate gatekeeper and his continued practical and financial support on behalf of the school, has been a critical factor in sustaining the Polyglot-Mahogany Rise partnership over seven years.

**In summary: the professional arts - education nexus**

	Knowledge base	Relationship to participants	What's needed
<b>Artists</b>	Professional arts practice; specific skills to share, facilitate and model; intuitive understanding &/or background in working in community and school settings; capacity to work organically, reactive to change and new stimuli; capacity for collaborative arts practices.	Visitor; can develop a professional friendship or become a collaborator; can be a role model or mentor; [with yearly residencies, can be an 'old friend' returning regularly]; professional obligation to respect institutional requirements of the school – may have no background knowledge of individual students (no baggage).	<b>Preparation:</b> Familiarisation with the Polyglot way of working with children; orientation to the school context; strategies for working with children who have experienced trauma. <b>Briefing:</b> Planning opportunities with co-artists and teacher – prior to and during workshop period. <b>Debriefing:</b> Opportunities to debrief with co-artists and teacher – prior to, during and after workshop period.
<b>Teachers/ Educational Support workers</b>	Professional teaching practice; specific skills in managing whole group and individual learning and behaviours; intuitive understanding &/or background in the arts – or not; capacity to create and work within a structured goal-oriented environment; capacity to relinquish control – or not.	Designated role to be responsible for the education and safety of the child during school hours; can be a role model or mentor; is aware of social and family circumstances of students in his/her class; less opportunities to work co-operatively alongside students.	<b>Preparation:</b> Where possible, introduction to the Polyglot way of working with children in situ – in another school or in a long-term partnership, in years prior to taking on a collaborative role. <b>Briefing:</b> Opportunities for input into planning prior to and during workshop period. <b>Collegiate support:</b> Invitation to other teachers; ES workers to be involved in the project so that the teacher is able to make meaning of the project in the school context. <b>Debriefing:</b> Opportunities to debrief with co-artists and teacher – prior to, during and after workshop period.
<b>Principals</b>	School management; educational principles; intuitive or professional understanding &/or background in the arts – or not; leadership capacities.	Designated role to oversee the education and safety of the child during school hours; can be a role model or mentor; is aware of social and family circumstances of students in the chosen class.	<b>Preparation:</b> Where possible, introduction to the Polyglot way of working with children in situ – in another setting. <b>Briefing:</b> Opportunities for input into planning prior to workshop period. <b>Collegiate support:</b> Opportunities to meet other partnership leaders who have taken on arts partnerships in their school or community setting. <b>Checking in &amp; Debriefing:</b> Opportunities to check in and debrief with artists and teacher – prior to, during and after workshop period.

## Mentoring – the Legacy Initiative

After several years of immersion in Polyglot projects through his role as an Education Support worker, in 2017 Nathan Wilson joined the Polyglot project team as an artist and also began developing a performing arts program at the school.

Polyglot saw these developments as evidence of cultural change taking place at the school and took the opportunity to support Nathan in his role as artist and performing arts teacher. Polyglot has provided Kate Kantor as a mentor in addition to the mentoring he has experienced through working with the other artists in the 2017 residency.

"I'm always really keen to know how one could have some kind of lasting effect in a school. So, what is really exciting is that Wilson, Nathan, I've just called him Wilson, really had the right ingredients already in his being, because he was an artist already, but was interested in working with kids, so he already had it, which is great, that he had the essence of an artist, but also the strong beginnings of being a really great teacher, so, what I think has been great for him is slowly but surely, he's understood the Polyglot process, over six years, or five years that he's been with us, and obviously that's developed and evolved and shaped his thinking, and he brings all his own experience to that as well, so, the fact that now, John Culley, the principal, has said, yes, I think this is too important, we can't just let everything fall once Polyglot finishes, I think that is... I'm really proud that we can leave that legacy, because otherwise, I think it's almost, you undo everything you've done, because... you don't undo it, those kids who experience it had that experience, but there isn't a lasting change in that school community."

**- Kate Kantor, Director Kids' Collaborations, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017**

While there are a number of challenges for a beginning arts facilitator and the school in integrating the arts more actively into their curriculum, this is evidence of cultural change at the school and Nathan Wilson is at the heart of this evolving arts-education nexus.

**Key Finding 10:** 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.

## CONCLUSION – THE WAY FORWARD

"Basically, you know, no ambition in this, we wanted cultural change in the school. We wanted there to be an arts focus, and an arts policy. I always wanted an arts policy. Write me a damn arts policy!"

- Sue Giles, Artistic Director, Polyglot Theatre, Interview 2017

When Polyglot artists first began working with Mahogany Rise students in 2011, there was no plan to return the following year. And when the next group of artists collaborated with Mahogany Rise students to create *Knock, Knock!* in 2012, there was still no thought of a seven year partnership. However, the seeds were sown in these early projects. Sue Giles found an ally in Principal John Culley, and Mr Culley found a group of artists who were interested in arts processes for *all* children, not a school production with opportunities for a lucky few. And Polyglot found a school where children embraced the process, celebrated the hard fun, discovered many new things about themselves and the world around them, and taught their adult collaborators many new things about themselves as well.

Over the seven years of workshops, installations and performances, scores of artworks have been created, countless drama games have been played, metres and metres of paper and masking tape have been unrolled for Big Draws and elegant costumes, shadow puppets and mysterious masks. It has been a busy time, characterised by playful exuberance, chaos and construction and breath-taking aesthetic moments. Behind the scenes, the logistical and financial challenges of bringing Polyglot artists to Frankston every year have consumed the energies of Polyglot staff and the school principal.

Each year, many of the ambitious project goals have been met. Evidence of burgeoning confidence and resilience amongst many of the young participants has been scrutinised and documented. In reflecting on the achievements of the partnership and the challenges that tested the resolve of its advocates, the question which emerges is not, why is this ending, but how did it last so long?

The funding landscape is a perennial problem for small theatre companies, and this long-term partnership is a testament to resourceful teams of arts workers and educators riding the waves of policy change and shifting funding initiatives.

Much can be learned from 'doing Polyglot', the seven year collaboration between Polyglot and Mahogany Rise— about mutual respect and shared goals as drivers for cultural change within a community; and about innovative arts programs which invite children to initiate their own processes of discovery and creativity; and about artists embracing collaborative, multi-arts events which privilege a collective vision rather than their own. As 2017 comes to an end, Polyglot has 'left the building' and the future of the arts at Mahogany Rise is in the hands of a young Education Support worker/musician and his school principal. This is indeed evidence of cultural change but not the sum total of Polyglot's legacy at Mahogany Rise. It's embedded in the collective memory of the school community, of the Year 9 student who remembers making a dream house out of a cardboard box when she was in Year 3, and a Year 8 student who still vividly recalls the film she made with her Dad the year that Polyglot gave the students video cameras. As John Culley says:

"So, that, for me, if we're drawing a line in the sand to say, okay, this is an end point, so what's going to happen next, well, I don't have any predictor about that, except that I don't know that my feeling, my gut feeling is the partnership won't end."

- John Culley, Principal, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Interview 2017

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This report concludes with four key recommendations.

### 1. Funding

This evaluation confirms previous research that indicates that a sustained presence in a school or community setting generates both immediate and incremental positive impacts for participants and artists in a long-term, multi-year arts partnership.

The report recommends that funding organisations where possible provide funding for a minimum of three years in order to maximize the resources invested.

### 2. Evaluation and reflexivity – a powerful tool for artists and arts organisations

This evaluation found that Polyglot's commitment to evaluation and review of their projects contributed to a culture of reflexivity and continuous improvement.

The report recommends that Polyglot continue this commitment to evaluative cycles and to build processes of reflection and review with artistic teams throughout the organisation.

### 3. Dissemination

This longitudinal evaluation and previous project evaluations have noted the potential links between the Polyglot process of child-led arts practice and core learning goals within the Australian curriculum.

This report recommends that Polyglot explore the possibility of partnering with the education sector to conduct a program of systematic research into the potential intersection of a child-led arts program and the development of generic capabilities as indicated in the Australian curriculum.

### 4. Dissemination

Over the past seven years, there has been a significant amount of documentation of Polyglot's process of child-led workshop explorations in a school setting. In addition to data collected for evaluations, there is a substantial archive of creative work and visual documentation.

This report recommends that Polyglot explore the possibility of consolidating the deep exploration of the child-led process afforded by the seven year collaboration at Mahogany Rise into a formal and substantial publication which could serve to inform other artists, educators, and interested community members about the nature and potential of this approach to school based arts practice.

"I'm sad that this is over. Polyglot has taught me to never doubt myself and what I can and can't do. Thank you."

- **Student, Grade 6, post-show speech, Altogether 2017**

"I think the summation of the whole process, there's a wonderful body of work that's been created. There's a wonderful body of experience that's been created for the individuals, for the students and the teachers and the community that have come and watched and been a part of that... Or even for me, because that thing's pushing me into some new areas of thought that maybe I hadn't confronted before, or hadn't thought about before, hadn't given the kids the options to do, so I think that richness around all of that is very important."

- **John Culley, Principal, Mahogany Rise Primary School, Interview 2017**



Image credit: Jason Heller



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