



Young People's Puppet Theatre

"They've shown they can do amazing things and they're ready to explore a bigger world"



Evaluating the impact of puppetry projects on children preparing to transition to secondary school

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Introduction



In 2018-2019, the Young People's Puppet Theatre (YPPT) commissioned the University of Hertfordshire to evaluate the impact of six puppet projects on children preparing to transition to secondary school in four different primary schools in Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Funded by a grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the study drew on data collected from a range of different sources (children involved in the project, their families, their schools and their project leaders and class teachers) using a range of different data collection methods (surveys, observations, interviews, reflections, pre/post measures of social and emotional skills) in order to gain different perspectives on the puppet projects and their impacts. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Hertfordshire's Ethics Committee. Photographs are courtesy of the YPPT and were not collected as part of the research; permission was granted for their use by the children's parents / carers .



Key findings



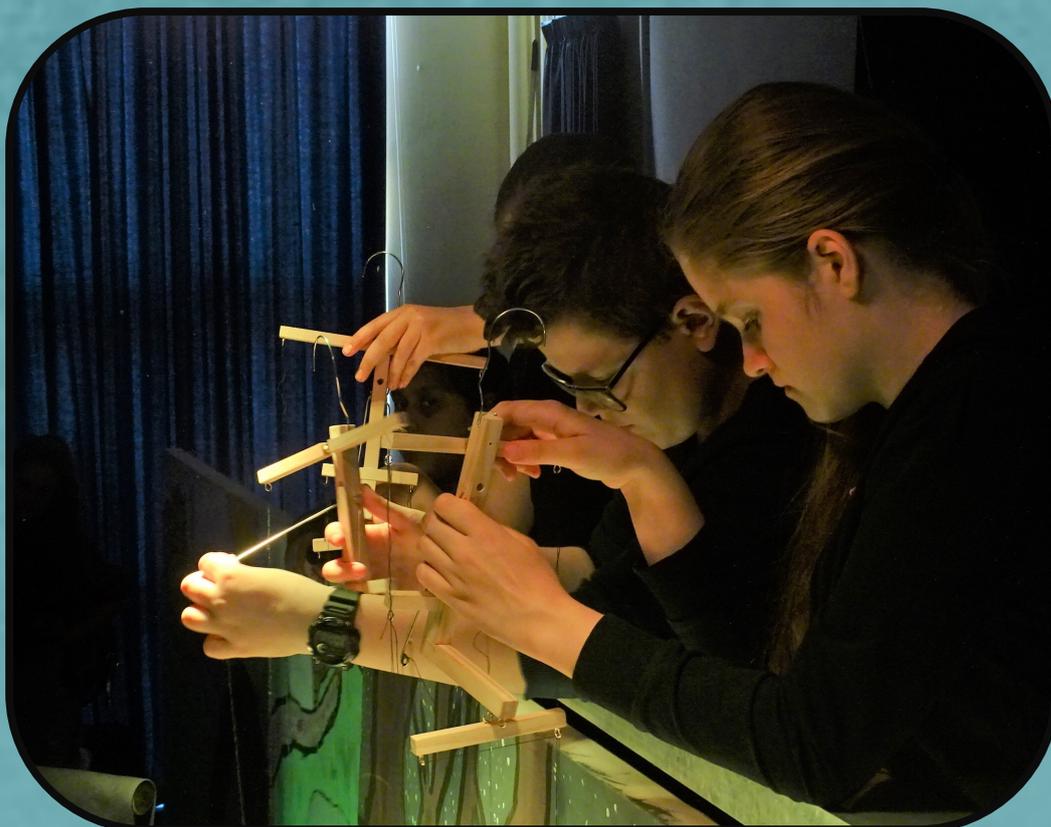
The projects resulted in:

1. Development of a vast array of technical skills

2. Development of transferable skills

- ⇒ Teamworking
- ⇒ Communication and organisation
- ⇒ Creativity and resilience
- ⇒ Engagement and confidence
- ⇒ Preparation for secondary transfer

3. New approaches to teaching and learning



1. Technical skills



*“But the **thing I am most proud of** is making the puppet because at the end of the day you need a puppet to make a beautiful puppet show”
(child)*

Puppetmaking and set design

- Designing puppets, sets and props;
- Sculpting small props and puppet heads;
- Following instructions to assemble puppet bodies and props;
- Cutting, sewing and personalising costumes;
- Stringing a puppet;
- Choosing appropriate brushes and colours for set painting;
- Painting canvasses and props, including detail;
- Scaling up a design;
- Using tools correctly.

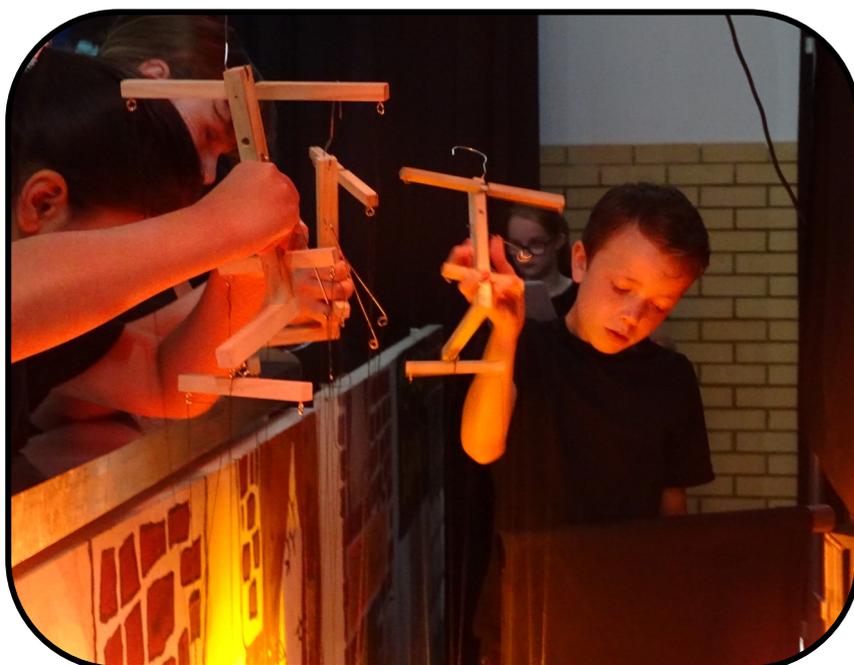
*“The children worked together to **measure the canvases and sketch** their designs, e.g. holding the ends of the **tape measure**, helping each other out with the **maths**” (project leader)*

Rehearsals and performances

- Checking and operating technical equipment;
- Manipulating the puppets;
- Operating the curtain;
- Moving the sets and positioning the props;
- Reading (or memorising) a script;
- Voicing puppets;
- Developing an awareness of the audience.

91% of parents and carers rated their child's show as "excellent"

"It went absolutely brilliantly. Really proud. Amazing how it went" (child)



2. Transferable skills



*“I think definitely **resilience** because there’s loads of parts I thought I couldn’t do and I **overcame them** and going and trying anyway and I didn’t give up. At some points I wanted to give up, but I just kept going on” (child)*

Teamworking

Teamworking skills developed progressively; beginning with helping each other, working together, and then **working collaboratively** to stage the performance.



Through teamworking, the children began to **develop respect for each other** and value the talents of their classmates; this respect was transferred into other areas of their school lives. The children were also able **to pass on their knowledge** and share their talents. Children, who did not ordinarily help others, found aspects of the puppet project where they could.

*“The most important thing I’ve learnt is that no one is more important than another person”
(child)*

Communication and organisation

Verbal communication permeated the project in various guises (e.g. sharing ideas, delegating jobs, providing feedback, asking for help, explaining how to do things, listening to and following instructions and answering questions). **Non-verbal communication** was important for the smooth running of operations backstage.



The complexity of the puppet project required **enhanced organisational skills** from the YPPT team, teachers and the children. **Heightened concentration** was necessary during the puppet making and set design phases to complete the tasks, and for the performances to run smoothly.

*“They’ve really **invested** in it and that’s been important to them, that feeling of **achievement** is massively important to them” (teacher)*

Resilience and creativity

The children developed **new skills**, and showed **open-mindedness** in relation to trying new things, even if those things were outside their comfort zones. The project encouraged them to be expressive in terms of their **creativity**, particularly in design and performance choices. The development of new skills and working in different ways was challenging and children showed and recognised **resilience** when doing things that were difficult, and in **maintaining enthusiasm** in the project over an extended period.



Engagement and confidence

Parents reported that the puppet project had changed their children's **attitude to and engagement in school**.

“She looks forward to coming to school more than before” (parent)

66% of parents and carers felt that the project had changed their child's attitude to school



Self-confidence developed, as initially many children sought reassurance from project leaders; it was **enduring** and was observed by teachers in other areas of their children's school lives.

Preparation for secondary transfer

Teachers recognised that the project had prepared the children



well for secondary transfer, and although some were still not fully prepared (e.g. emotionally, or because of a specific special educational need), most were ready to move on and they would transition with enthusiasm and anticipation about new experiences, carrying skills and fond memories with them.

*“The puppet project is one of the big things for the children, especially the performance bit, that really helps them to **develop some of the skills they are going to need to go to secondary school, like that independence and like that resilience**” (teacher)*

3. Teaching and learning



*“Watching how the project leader gets them to be **independent** and trusts them to do things is really nice because sometimes as teachers we are too quick to step in and help them and the project leader steps back and **lets them make mistakes** and learn from them” (teacher)*

Impact on host schools

The projects gave teachers a different view of their pupils, and **alternative approaches** to stretch and challenge them.

Teachers were also able to link the project to other parts of the curriculum, and to develop their

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curriculum further as a result of the project. The project also

enhanced teachers'

understanding of teaching and

learning in the arts, and

knowledge and skills associated with arts-based learning.



*“Our play linked to one of our first English topics (we purposefully studied the same text), which helped to **bring the story alive** – the children found it much easier to imagine themselves in the characters’ shoes”
(teacher)*

Impact on specific pupils

Teachers and project leaders identified specific groups of children who they felt **benefitted particularly** from the puppet project. These included children who:

- Do not see themselves as artistic;
- Have limited experience of the arts;
- Struggle academically;
- Have challenging behaviour;
- Are anxious;
- Are generally quiet;
- Have special educational needs.



The benefits of the project, however, were deemed to be **universal**.

*“I have a child who is **severely dyslexic** and so struggles in academic classes. They are, however, very artistic and this has been a session in which **the other children ask them to help them**” (teacher)*

Future developments



The study raised some areas for future development for the YPPT, including:

- The explicit teaching of technical skills and **articulation of the key skills and attributes** being developed;
- **Awareness raising** of the opportunities to work in the creative and performing arts;
- **Closer working with teachers** to further enhance the impact of the projects;
- Supporting the **on-going development of teachers** in arts-based activities;
- Engaging in **ongoing formative evaluation** and impact measurement.

Get involved!



You can request the full report of this study by emailing admin@yppt.org.uk.

If you're from a school and would like to bring the benefits of the YPPT's projects to your school, they are currently looking for host schools for projects starting from September 2020-21—visit www.yppt.org.uk for more information.

