

ARTS BRIDGE

charity

REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1158002

Young Theatre Makers
Evaluation October 2018

YOUNG THEATRE MAKERS 2017-2018

An Arts Bridge Charity Project

Supported by:

**The London
Community
Foundation**



WALCOT
FOUNDATION

Contents

1. Introduction
2. About Arts Bridge Charity
3. About Young Theatre Makers
4. What Did Young Theatre Makers Achieve?
5. What Can ABC Learn from the Young Theatre Makers Project?
6. What Next for Young Theatre Makers?

Introduction

This evaluation has been conducted by an independent evaluator and is based on the widely used model called 'illuminative evaluation' (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972) chosen as most appropriate for evaluating small scale innovatory programmes such as Young Theatre Makers¹. This approach sets out to provide a detailed picture, illuminating how a programme and its effects are seen and judged by different people; showing how the programme operates and how it is influenced by its context; discerning significant features that affect its operation and effectiveness.

The methodology used to evaluate the Young Theatre Makers project included surveys, interviews, observations and examination of project documentation and records.

¹ Parlett, M. And Hamilton, D. (1972) Evaluation as Illumination: A New Approach to the Study of Innovatory Programs". Occasional Paper, Edinburgh University.

About Arts Bridge Charity

Since its inception in 2011, Arts Bridge Charity (ABC) has delivered Arts-based workshops in communities and schools throughout London with the aim of widening participation to the arts for BAME children and young people, fostering understanding between communities, and engaging children with literacy through the creative arts.

Literacy influences all spheres of life and the acquisition of literacy skills has a profound impact on a child's future. Having a solid grounding in English is a critical foundational element of any good education – without it, it is more difficult for children to access the wider curriculum, and can undermine social mobility. Young children with poor literacy skills go on to achieve poorer GCSE results, which significantly affects their future; studies have shown that if a child from a poor family is already behind with their reading at the age of seven, they have just over a one in five chance of going on to achieve a C in English at GCSE.¹ Low literacy rates have negative impacts in later life: men and women with poor literacy are least likely to be in full-time employment at the age of 30.² Literacy rates are strongly linked to health³ and employment⁴ outcomes in later life, and low literacy rates can even be a risk factor in going to prison.⁵

That in Britain today, one of the richest countries in the world, young children still fall behind, and stay behind at school, is in large part because of an enduring 'achievement gap': the gap in outcomes between disadvantaged children (in this country measured by uptake of free school meals) and their better-off peers (those not entitled to free school meals). What this gap means is that, by the time they are seven, nearly 80% of the difference in GCSE results between rich and poor children has already been determined. In other words, half way through primary school, many children's educational – and, often, life – chances have been largely decided on grounds that are unfair.⁶

The aim of ABC's work is to facilitate a positive change in a child's engagement with literacy, in turn influencing their future life chances. Building on experience gained since 2011, ABC has designed a programme of specialised interactive, drama-based workshops devised around a carefully chosen series of books and themes that are relatable to children of BAME heritage, with the aim of increasing engagement with literacy and widening participation with the arts. This approach is at the core of the Young Theatre Makers project.

² Save the Children, *Too Young to Fail Report*, 2013

³ G Dugdale and C Clark (2008) *Literacy Changes Lives: An advocacy resource*. London: National Literacy Trust/literacy, World Literacy Foundation

⁴ Every Child a Chance Trust (2009) *The long-term costs of literacy difficulties*, 2nd edition

⁵ A Wolf (2011) *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*, London: Department of Education Every Child a Reader (ECaR) Annual Report 2011–12 (March 2013)

⁶ Ministry of Justice (2012) *The pre-custody employment, training and education status of newly sentenced prisoners*, London: Ministry of Justice.

⁷ Save the Children, *Too Young to Fail Report*, 2013



About Young Theatre Makers

AIMS

Young Theatre Makers aimed to:

1. Engage children with literacy through the performing arts
2. Make art forms accessible to children with BAME heritage

MODEL

YTM is a pilot for a new way of working for ABC: if the project is successful, ABC will apply for funding to roll the project out to other London schools. The project has been developed through an iterative model, with a mid-project evaluation feeding learning into the project design for the second phase of delivery.

The project model incorporates a range of art forms and artists in school and community settings, with three distinct phases:

1. In-school workshops are delivered by ABC practitioners (established theatre-makers - directors, actors and playwrights). Using drama and creative writing activities, ABC's practitioners work with children to create short plays based on the book *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold. *Tar Beach* has a protagonist of BAME heritage, providing important representation for the participating children.

2. An 'Intensive Week' is delivered during half term. Building on the work done through the in-school workshops, the short plays are developed through workshops and rehearsals, and are realised through a live performance to an invited community audience. In addition, over the course of the week, practical workshops on different art forms are delivered by visiting professional artists from different artistic disciplines. Participants are supported by two mentors throughout the Intensive Week; the mentors emerging artists from the local community.
3. YTM establish a local after-school club in one of the participating schools at the end of the project, providing an opportunity for participants to sustain their engagement with the arts on a longer-term basis.

YTM worked with **225** children from four schools:

Archbishop Sumner
Sudbourne Primary school
St Saviours
Henry Fawcett

In autumn 2017 and spring 2018.

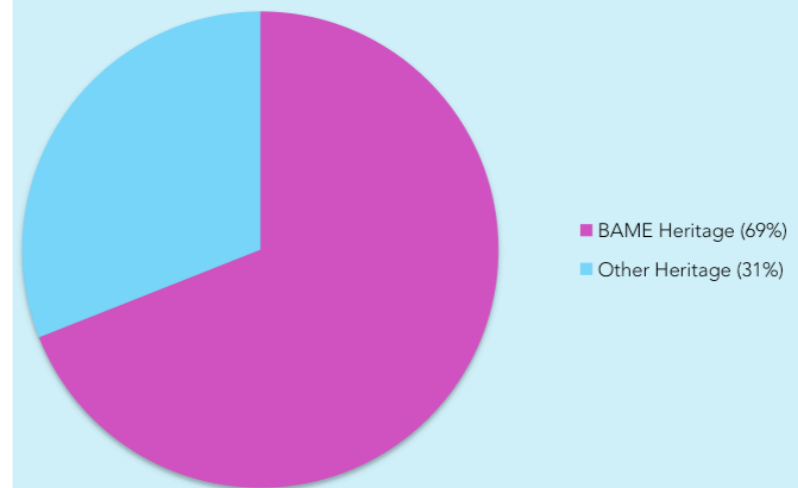
What did Young Theatre Makers Achieve?



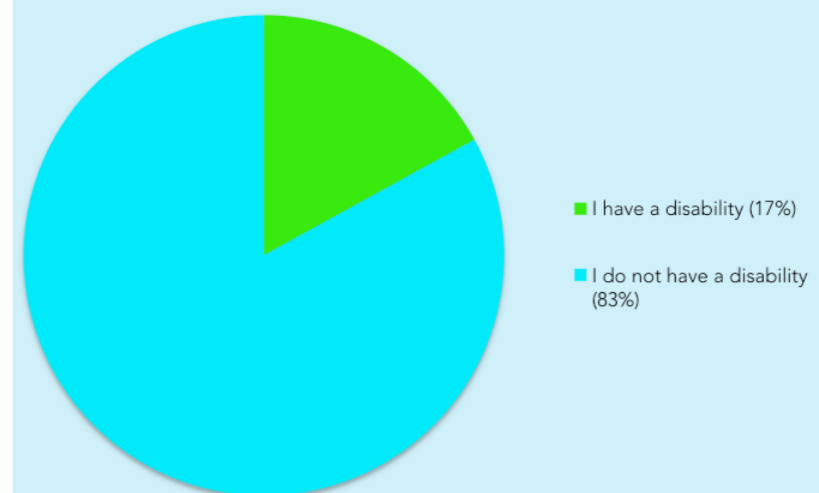
PARTICIPATION

ABC worked with a specialist coordinator at Brixton Learning Collaboration and Lambeth's Windmill Cluster to target schools where YTM could make the greatest impact. The children that took part in YTM attend schools that all have a significantly above average % of children in receipt of the Pupil Premium (PP), and Free School Meals (FSM), which is considered proxy indicator for measuring socio-economic deprivation, and where the ethnic heritage of the children is diverse.

Ethnic Heritage of Participating Children

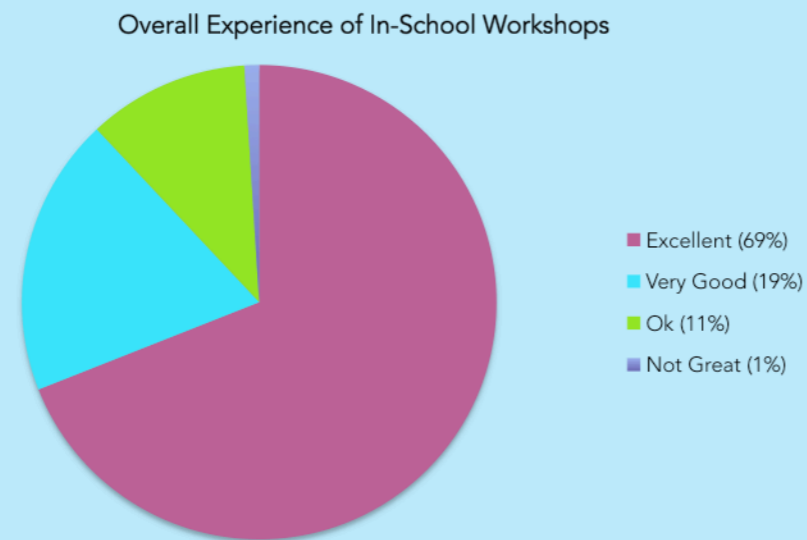


Number of Participants with a Disability



EXPERIENCE

The in-school workshops were extremely well received by pupils and teachers, with 88% of children rating their experience as excellent or very good.



Similarly, **89%** of children scored the **overall experience of the Intensive Weeks** as **Excellent** or **Very Good**.

QUALITY

89% of children scored the **impact** and **quality of the activities** for in-school workshops as **Excellent** or **Very Good**.

100% of children scored the **quality of ABC practitioners very highly** or **highly**.

"I really really enjoyed doing drama because you learn more things!! it would be great if you could come back for a long time. It's good because you can show what you have learned in different ways. i liked every bit of it. Thank you Amanda. You are a great teacher"

YTM Participant

IMPACT

Parent/Carer Perspectives

Parents, carers and community members were invited to attend a performance at the end of each intensive week, enabling the children to perform their original, devised work to a live audience.

When asked what ABC had done well, many reported that improved confidence was a positive impact of the project, as well as introducing children to the arts and the professionalism of the practitioners, with comments such as:

"Kept the kids entertained and instilled confidence - by the looks of the final performance"

"Getting the children to engage with each other. Helping them to be more confident"

"Worked hard with the children and gave them all the opportunity to shine"

"Giving the children confidence"

"The children really enjoyed. This is due to the staff's patience, enthusiasm and professionalism"

"Providing free workshop means it's accessible to all (financially). Friendly adults running workshop"

"Kept the children engaged and given them a realisation of their potential"

When asked directly about impact, comments centred again on confidence, and also on the new opportunity and creativity of the project. A sample of comments include:

"Motivation, creativity and self confidence to perform and learn arts Improve their confidence"

"Building his confidence"

"Positive impact - boosted confidence and had lots of fun"

"She's had a lot of fun and it's great for her to have an outlet to release her creative side"

"New opportunity and experience"

"Reinforcing consistency and not giving up"

"Has given her something to work on and motivated her. She has not wanted to take part in any clubs / activities for a long time"

100% of parent/carer respondents **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that their child had **benefitted from taking part in the project.**

89% of parent/carer respondents **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that working with professional artists provided **a new perspective on arts** for my child

100% of parent/carer respondents **strongly agreed** that they would **want their child to take part in an ABC activity again.**

100% of parent/carer respondents **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that **the activity was successful in motivating and engaging their child with the arts.**

TEACHER / SCHOOL PERSPECTIVES

Common themes that emerged on the impact of YTM from teacher evaluations and feedback were:

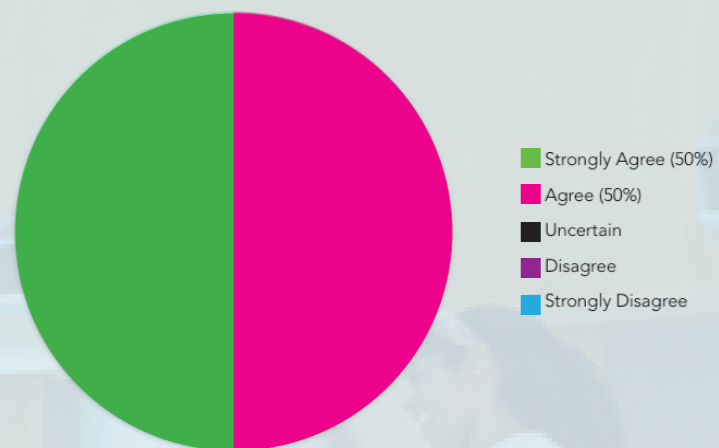
Confidence building that YTM enabled for its pupil participants

Impact on teachers' own practice, including how drama is a powerful means of accessing a literary text for some children:

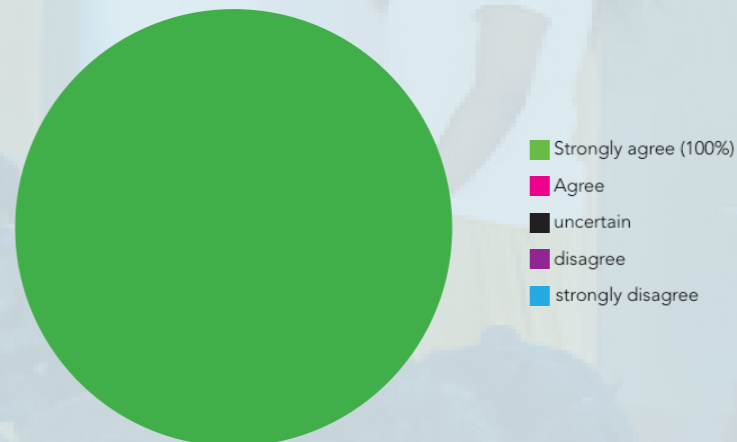
'As a school we would like to do some staff training on the use of drama for literacy' 'Ways into the book...through drama' ; 'Shown just how much acting enables children to develop their ideas'

All teachers involved in the YTM project **strongly agreed** or **agreed** that their pupils benefitted from taking part in the project, that working with professional artists provided new perspectives on the arts for their pupils, that YTM was successful in motivating and engaging their pupils with the arts, and that they would want their pupils to participate in another ABC project.

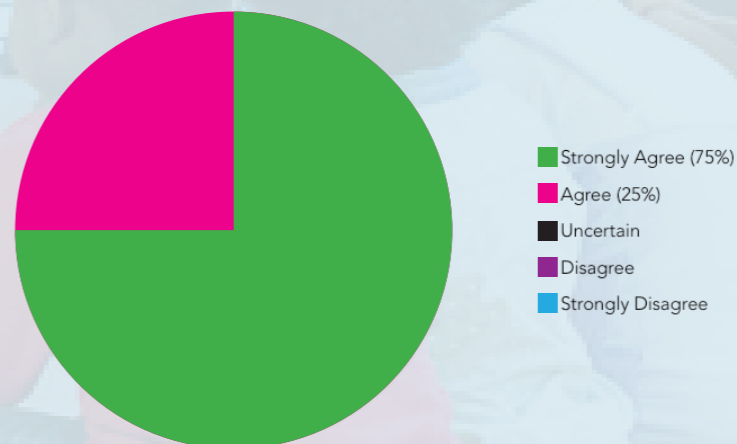
My pupils benefitted from taking part in this project



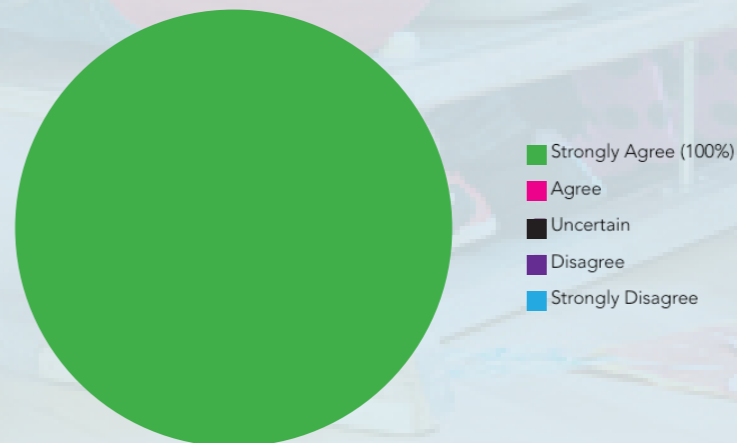
Working with professional artists provided a new perspective on the arts for my pupils



The activity was successful in motivating and engaging my pupils with the arts



I would want my pupils to take part in an ABC activity again



WHAT CAN ABC LEARN FROM THE YOUNG THEATRE MAKERS PROJECT?

What worked well?

The particular features of the YTM model that were identified by those interviewed and/or surveyed as part of the evaluation as particularly contributing to its success are highlighted below.

These features could be considered as a starting point for a Theory of Change for ABC, which is a positive outcome for the project.

1. The Model

Feedback from schools was that the structure of using performing arts activities in-school as a stimulus to access literacy was extremely effective:

"Helped children with their listening skills and ability to work together in groups"

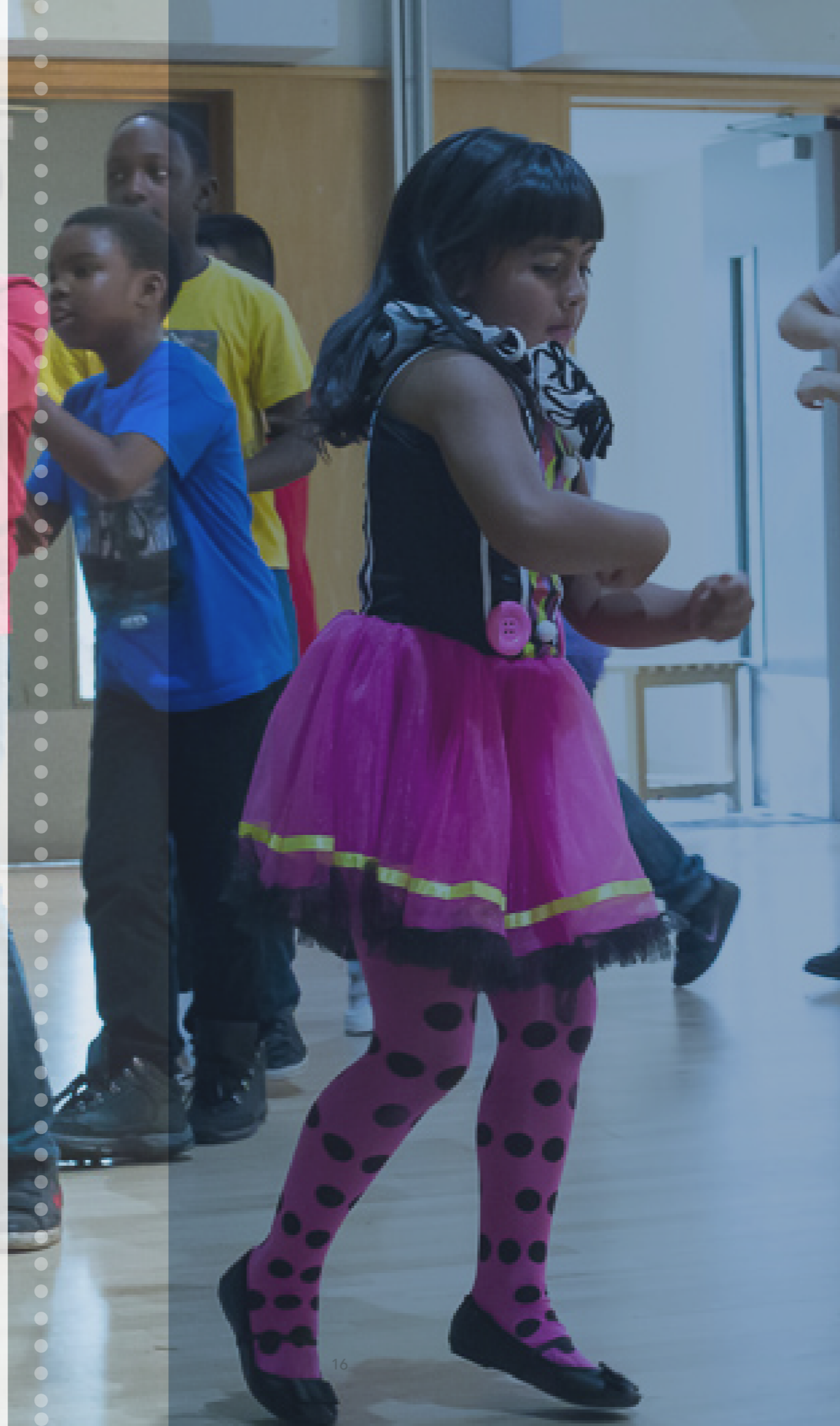
"Inspired children. Allowed children to express themselves, explore the story, internalise the story, empathise with the characters, learn new drama techniques"

"Making links from the book to the drama. Making them think about characters and feelings"

"Very clear progress within the lessons. Group work helped to build confidence in kids. Range of activities, building on previous lessons"

2. The Mentors

Common themes emerged in participant feedback on the positive impact of having the mentors take part in the 'Intensive Week's. Mentors are young people from the local community who are emerging artists. They appear to have been considered more as peers by the children taking part, and they had a positive impact for many participants. Interestingly, this was highlighted as an area for learning and further development by ABC.



3. School and Community Setting

ABC's choice to operate from community settings that includes schools but also Community Centres is significant, as reported by the community members and by participants when sessions took place outside of school – children preferred to be out of school for the sessions.

ABC understands that engaging with the curriculum is critical to a child's success, and working with schools and teachers enables ABC to A) access the children it can impact the most, and B) impact the teaching in schools. However, by placing the work in the community ABC sets itself apart from the school and in doing so makes its work more accessible to some parts of the community.

This approach is backed up by research: around 80% of the difference in how well children do at school is dependent on what happens outside the school gates, whether it is in the home or in the wider community.¹

4. Professional Artists from Different Arts Forms

During the intensive week, masterclasses were delivered by established artists from hip-hop, acting and music, from a range of social and ethnic backgrounds, including Tavaziva Dance and Metta Theatre. Children, schools, parents and mentors fed back that this provided dynamism and inspiration to the group.

"The modules of masterclasses were fantastic. A great variety, a real great addition"

Creative Partner

¹ J Rasbash et al (2010) 'Children's educational progress: partitioning family, school and area effects', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society)*, Volume 173, Issue 3, p.659 gov.uk/government/publications/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2013.

KEY LEARNING TO INFORM FUTURE PROJECTS

Key Learning for ABC to take forward beyond the life of the project includes developing long-term relationships with school and school partnership groups, particularly to enable the delivery of CPD training for teachers which wasn't possible to arrange as part of this project.

Practical learning included changing the timings of the 'Intensive Week' to more closely reflect the school day, to make childcare/attendance easier and to increase the length of performance to allow more of the artforms learnt during the 'Intensive Week' to be showcased.

ABC will also review whether a scratch night is a realistic outcome of the project.

Following the Autumn term delivery, ABC provided a more structured 'Scheme of Work' for the in-school sessions to give new practitioners more support, and introduced a training session for new practitioners on workshop management skills, as well as the content session delivered.



WHAT NEXT FOR YOUNG THEATRE MAKERS?

ABC ran a taster session for a YTM after-school club at St Saviour's School in June 2018, and evaluated this session. Results were positive and in response ABC has established a weekly YTM after-school club at St Saviour's School and Sudbourne primary school as a legacy of this project. 42 children attend.

ABC will review the findings of this evaluation, and consider the potential for further roll-out of the programme in Lambeth and Tottenham, ABC's local borough.

Contact Us

info@arts-bridge.co.uk

020 3222 3085

ARTS BRIDGE
c h a r i t y
REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 1158002

All photography in this report by
Jennifer Heller