

Big Brum Theatre in Education

More and Better Project

External Evaluators Report

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an evaluation exercise to enable Big Brum to review and develop its theory, strategy and practice in the context of a changing education environment for arts provisions and funding cuts to education and the arts, by obtaining the evidence for assessing the impact of Big Brum's work on children and young people. The evaluation process of data collection and interpretation took place over 2 years, covering the *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Flee* tours in 2017 and 2018.

Rumpelstiltskin featured an adaptation from the original Grimm's fairy tale and was designed to ask deep questions about the value of a child's life. *Flee*, a story about a young refugee lost in a forest, who is found by a local British schoolboy, invited thinking about what it feels like to be lost. The performances including Theatre in Education (TIE) participative workshops were generally two hours long.

Data were collected from 21 performances in 11 primary and 3 secondary schools, involving approximately 630 pupils. Most of the schools are located in deprived areas of Birmingham. 13 out of the 14 schools have above average proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and in 9 of the 14 schools the number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds was above average, sometimes the majority. A total of 20 interviews with teachers and 10 workshop sessions with pupils were conducted. 452 drawn or written responses to tasks were received from the pupils.

In addition, the evaluation team attended one workshop, as well as planning and appraisal sessions for two six week specially designed extended learning projects at two Birmingham primary academies. The first was a *Rumpelstiltskin* project with year 3 pupils designed to develop more confident talkers and writers. The second, a *Romeo and Juliet* project with year 6 pupils, focused on teachers' professional development as well as developing pupils' empathy, understanding and expressive skills.

The evaluation of the impact of Big Brum's work was based on 2 questions:

1. Working with children - To what extent have young people gained a greater felt understanding of themselves and the world through their work with Big Brum?
2. Working with teachers - To what extent has this work met the learning needs of young people?

Sub-questions included:

- How have pupils responded to the work?
- How has this work enhanced young people's personal, social and emotional development?
- How has this work helped young people think through complex issues (use higher order thinking skills)?
- How have young people used language, images and drama to articulate that cognitive and emotional understanding?

- Are there particular pupils or groups of pupils for whom that impact has been especially marked/noticeable?

There is compelling evidence from the performance observations, interviews, workshop sessions drawings and written work that pupils have gained a greater felt understanding of themselves and the world through their work with Big Brum.

The evidence demonstrates that:

- a) The pupils were interested and showed a high level of engagement and participation during the performances and TIE workshop sessions
- b) The pupils responded well to Big Brum's approach
- c) The pupils were engaged emotionally
- d) The pupils showed empathy
- e) The story was seen by teachers to reflect the children's own situations and pupils were able to relate parts of the story to themselves and others
- f) The pupils' responses indicated the use of higher order thinking skills
- g) The pupils used language, images and drama to express emotions and understanding
- h) Big Brum's work had noticeable impact on normally disengaged or difficult pupils

Teachers liked that the performances were broken up with TIE workshop sessions, which built a thread of ideas and thoughts and created space for expanding thinking and giving opportunity to ask questions. The open and friendly approach of actors was noted, especially the ability to create a safe environment for exploring difficult and deep issues. They commented that it was 'real theatre', which would normally be outside the experience of many of the pupils. The evaluation evidence demonstrates that:

- The teachers like the way the TIE sessions draw in and engage the pupils in open discussion
- The pupils were able to identify parts of the stories with their own life experiences
- There was a noticeable impact on normally disengaged pupils and pupils with special needs

The comments from teachers in the two extended projects further reinforce the findings above. The teachers agreed that the pupils' personal and social confidence, empathy and especially language skills had increased. The pupils were able to relate the story to their own lives, identify with the needs of the character and imagine the consequences if the character was not helped. They were able to articulate their own learning, think deeply and discuss possible solutions.

It is recommended that Big Brum further develop the following:

- a) Although the two-hour performances with TIE workshops have considerable impact on the emotional and personal development of pupils, the impacts on learners is more assured on the extended TIE programmes. Hence, Big Brum should make more effort to engage schools in longer TIE programmes.
- b) Big Brum should continue working with teachers and schools to utilise existing attainment metrics for assessing impact and, if needed, establish more vigorous methods for evaluating measurable changes in behaviour or attitudes and improvement in cognitive skills, emotional development and social development. Big Brum should work towards developing tools to capture longer term impact.
- c) The involvement and understanding of teachers regarding the value of TIE is essential to ensure that the impacts on the pupils are understood, followed up and further developed accordingly. Big Brum should continue to work in partnership with schools on longer term projects that involve sustained and in-depth work with teachers, including collaborating on how they prepare for and follow-up TIE work, and on observing and analysing pupils' responses to it.
- d) The impact of Big Brum's work on under-achieving, disengaged or disinterested pupils should be further developed and researched.
- e) While the responses from the pupils demonstrate the value of young people's voices in providing evidence for impact evaluation, Big Brum should undertake more research to further develop quality procedures that ensure the questions used and the tasks set for pupils to do during evaluation exercises are not biased and that pupils are not responding to a perceived script or saying what they think the facilitator wants to hear.
- f) Teachers are generally very busy and one lesson learned during the evaluation process was that the semi structured interview method with an agreed time frame and concise questions is the most effective way for obtaining assessments from the teachers. The low response to emailed questionnaire indicates that feedback from teachers is best not conducted in this way.

1 Introduction

Big Brum has successfully delivered Theatre in Education (TIE) to schools in Birmingham and the West Midlands since it was founded in 1982. However, due to changes in the education sector, Big Brum needs to strengthen the body of evidence to demonstrate the value of theatre in education to schools. Big Brum therefore embarked on a 3 year “More and Better Project”, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, to further develop the case for the continued delivery of Theatre in Education.

As part of the More and Better Project Big Brum had commissioned a team of external evaluators to assist with gathering and analysing the impact of its TIE work. The brief was to capture evidence of the impact of Big Brum’s work on children and young people to enable the company to review and develop its theory, strategy and practice in the context of a changing education environment for arts provision and funding cuts.

The external evaluation team brought together a range of cross-sector expertise covering the arts, education and working with young people, as well as project design and evaluation in the public, voluntary and creative sectors. The evaluation team consisted of **People and Organisation Ltd** - a public service management consultancy, **Iris Bertz Ltd** - specialises in the arts and education and **Strawberry Words** (formerly Harvey Arts) - an arts education company. The members of the external evaluator team and their experience are further detailed in Annex A.

In addition, Big Brum also set up an Advisory Group, consisting of teachers, theatre professionals, Big Brum staff and board members, to provide guidance, advice and feedback to the external evaluators. In the second year of the project, Big Brum also set up Interpretation Groups of teachers and practitioners to help with analysing and understanding the data collected.

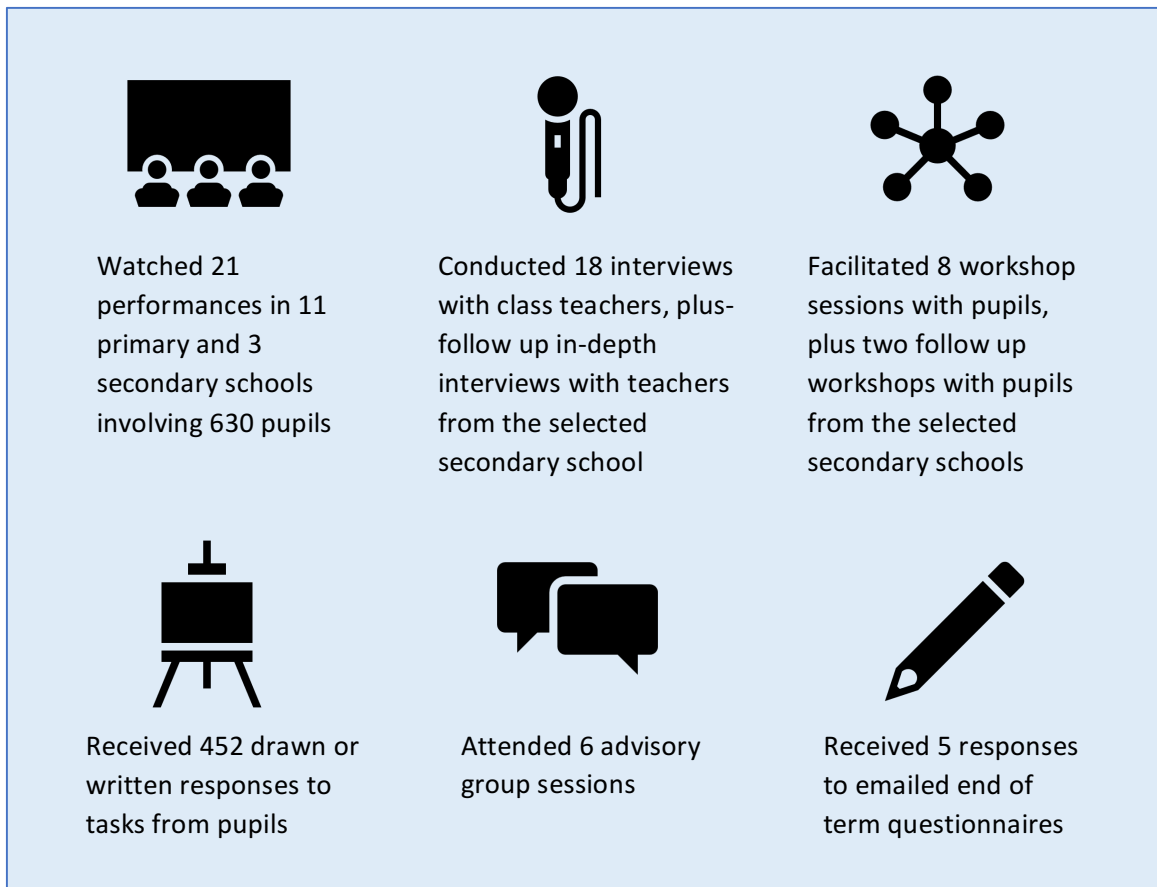
2 Data Collection and Evaluation Methods

The evaluation process of data collection and subsequent interpretation took place over 2 years, covering the *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Flee* tours in 2017 and 2018. Both performances were generally two hours long.

- *Rumpelstiltskin*, written for the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, featured an adaptation from the original Grimm’s fairy tale and asks deep questions about the value of a child’s life. The programme combines the performance of 'Rumpelstiltskin' with participatory workshops, enabling Primary pupils to interact meaningfully within the drama and test their own values in response to the unfolding story.
- *Flee* was a story about a young refugee lost in a forest, who is found by a local British schoolboy. The programme combined live performance and participatory activities

that explore the plight of those who are lost and whose world is in transition and gave pupils in Year 5 upwards a chance to engage imaginatively with the play's themes and concepts of being and feeling lost.

Over the two years the evaluation team undertook the following:



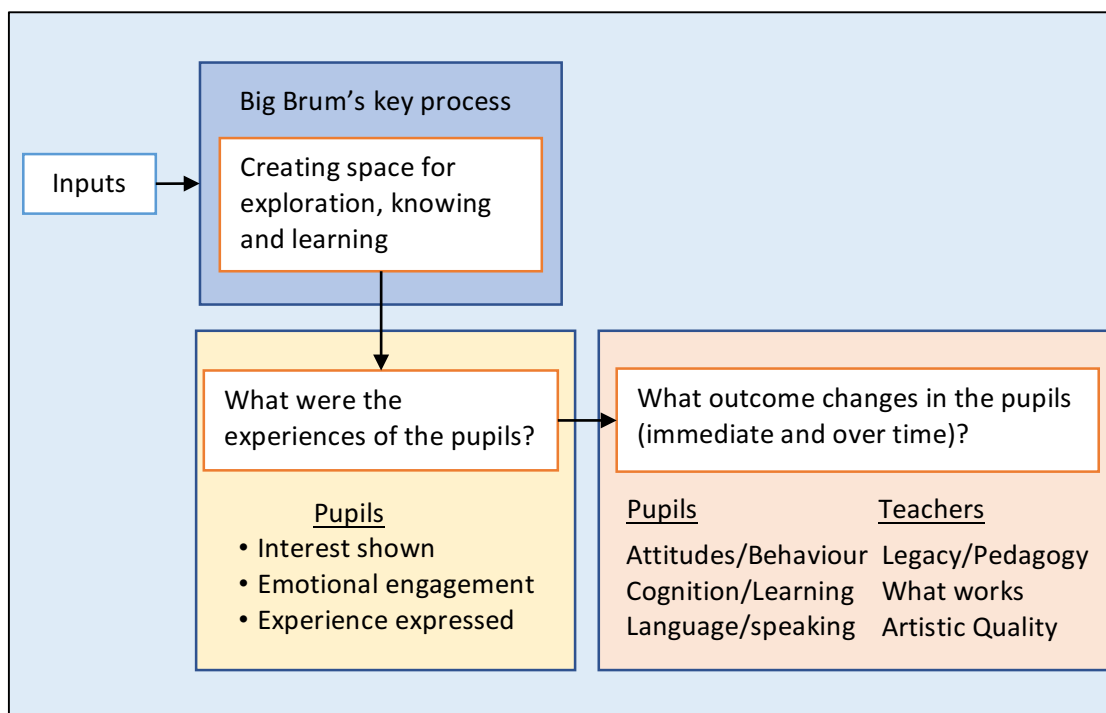
Most of the primary and secondary schools that participated in the evaluation exercise are located in deprived areas of Birmingham.

- 13 out of the 14 schools have above average proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding.
- In 9 of the 14 schools the number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds was above average, sometimes the majority.
- The majority of school visited (11 out of 14) by the evaluation team were in the 10% most deprived areas in the country.

The following sections describe the evaluation criteria and data collection methods used over the 2 years

2.1 Rumpelstiltskin Tour - 2017

After an initial inception period with orientation meetings, staff and stakeholder interviews, desk research and initial observations of performances in schools the following evaluation framework was scoped and agreed with Big Brum and the Advisory Group.



From the evaluation framework, the data collection format for the *Rumpelstiltskin* tour consisted of:

- Pre and post-performance semi structured interviews of 15 to 30 minutes with teachers, which included questions about the motives for booking Big Brum and their expectations; what teachers had noticed about the performance and the children's reactions including unusual responses, if children were connecting with the performance; the teacher's resource and curriculum relevance.
- Observation of pupils' engagement and reactions during the performances by teachers and evaluators recorded on observation forms. The forms featured separate sections for the performance and TIE workshop parts of the Big Brum visit, with pre-set words to select, as well as open space where teachers could comment in their own words. Words suggested in the performance sections were mainly descriptions of the pupils' behaviour and reactions whereas the workshop section focused on reactions, participation and thinking.
- Children's feedback: at the end of the performance the actors asked the pupils to write a set of rules, a royal proclamation or design a poster. In addition, the external evaluators invited the children to draw or write about what they had seen, what they might have learned, something they might have experienced themselves and how it made them feel.

- Self-completion online questionnaires were emailed to teachers about one month later, asking about any further observations or impact noticed in the children since the performance, any follow up activities the teacher might have undertaken and understanding or learning inspired by the play.

Data collection on the impact of the *Rumpelstiltskin* tour took place during June and July 2017, involving 13 performances for Year 1 to 4 classes in 8 different inner city primary schools. The data collected, findings and lessons learned were discussed with Big Brum and the Advisory Group in October 2017. The following issues were discussed and changes to the evaluation methodology agreed.

- The value of quantitative versus qualitative data was discussed. As the sample size is rather small (the number of participating schools and teachers are limited), it was agreed that in-depth qualitative data focusing on the teachers' and pupils' experience of the narrative was more valuable.
- Hence, more attention should be given to exploring emotional engagement and felt understanding¹ via the teacher interviews and the children's feedback sessions in the form of writings and drawings.

2.2 *Flee Tour - 2018*

The methodology adopted during the *Flee* tour in 2018 was to focus more on an in-depth approach and triangulation from different viewpoints, that is, the outcomes intended by Big Brum; the feelings and understanding expressed by pupils and the perceptions of the teachers. Following Big Brum's review of the requirements of the More and Better project and guidance from the Advisory Group, the evaluation scope was streamlined into the following 2 criteria:

Criterion 1. Working with children -

To what extent have young people gained a greater felt understanding of themselves and the world through their work with Big Brum?

- a) How has this work enhanced young people's personal, social and emotional development?
- b) How has this work helped young people think through complex issues (use higher order thinking skills)?
- c) How have young people used language, images and drama to articulate that cognitive and emotional understanding?

¹ '...real understanding is a process of coming to understand: we cannot 'give' someone our understanding. Real understanding is felt.'

Geoff Gillham, "The Value of Theatre in Education", in, SCYPT Journal, 27, 1994, p.5.

Criterion 2. Working with teachers

To what extent has this work met the learning needs of young people?

- a) How have pupils responded to the work?
- b) In particular:
 - How has this work enhanced young people's personal, social and emotional development?
 - How has this work helped young people think through complex issues (use higher order thinking skills)?
 - How have young people used language, images and drama to articulate that felt understanding?
- c) Are there particular pupils or groups of pupils for whom that impact has been especially marked/noticeable?

The data collection formats for the *Flee* tour were streamlined and consisted of:

- Semi structured interviews with teachers (20-30 min). Similar to the *Rumpelstiltskin* format above, covering engagement, responses and emotions, but with more emphasis on what pupils may have attained.
- Workshop group feedback sessions with pupils facilitated by the evaluators (30 minute) The tasks and questions included recalling the memorable moments, asking children how they felt, why and when, if they could relate to the play, have been in similar situations and why others might like to see the play.
- Follow up tasks for pupils completed in class time consisted of a review of the performance for a school magazine, blog or a letter explaining the play to a young person in the future.
- End of term self-completion questionnaire for teachers asked if further work had been done with the pupils around by the play and any further thoughts or observations since the previous interview in general and regarding the main themes of the pupils' personal social emotional development, higher level thinking about complex issues and expressing their understanding and experience.

The interviews with teachers were carried out where possible within a week of the performance. Workshop sessions with pupils, which were facilitated by evaluation team members, were undertaken where possible also within one week of the performance².

² Within a week and not on the performance day, to allow the experience to settle and time for reflection but not so long that pupils and teachers would forget.

In addition, 2 secondary schools were selected to provide more in-depth feedback, with extended interview and workshop sessions (60 minutes)-and follow up teacher interviews and workshop session (30 min) about 1 month later.

The second round of data collection took place during March and April 2018. This included 8 participating schools, with 5 performances for year 5 and year 6 primary classes and 3 performances for year 8 and year 10 secondary school classes.

An Interpretation Group consisting of experts from theatre, education and Big Brum was set up to assess and interpret the *Flee* data. Two interpretation sessions were held, which looked at the material obtained from one primary and one secondary school, i.e. the transcripts of all teacher interviews for the relevant age group and workshop notes as well as written work and drawings produced by pupils.

2.3 Extended Learning Projects

External evaluators attended the planning and evaluation sessions for two specially designed 6 week long extended learning projects in two primary schools of a Birmingham Academy Trust and also observed pupil feedback events in both schools.

The evaluation team was not involved in data collection for the 2 extended learning projects. The team attended the sessions in order to gain a broader understanding of Big Brum's work and impact. Both primary schools are located in the 10% most deprived areas in the UK.

- In 2017 a Rumpelstiltskin project with year 3 pupils and teachers aimed to develop more confident talkers and writers, especially among less confident children.
- In 2018, a Romeo and Juliet project with Year 6 pupils focused primarily on teachers' professional development, but it also involved immersive work around the story, developing pupils' empathy, their understanding of story and expressive skills.

3 Findings

The evaluation findings presented below are set out according to the evaluation criteria outlined on page 5 and are based on all the data collected across the two years i.e. from both the *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Flee* tours.

3.1 Pupils responses to Big Brum's work

This section discusses the pupils' engagement during the TIE performances.

a) **Our evaluation evidence demonstrates that the pupils were interested and showed a high level of engagement and participation.**

Quotations from teachers

"... started getting on their knees as the performance went on to get closer - showing they were interested, children looked inquisitive and thoughtful."

"Children silent – could hear a pin drop, engaged and fully absorbed."

"Just their enthusiasm and excitement for the questions at the end of the main part - the girls in front of us were really drawn into the play they could not wait what would come next."

"Children struggled to put their opinion and ideas into words but tried hard and were eager to try to participate"

"They looked very much as if they were measuring up and asking, trying to process what was going on."

This is apparent across the different performances and age groups and well documented in observation forms and teacher comments. In general, the pupils were eager to participate in the TIE workshop sessions. Secondary school pupils were however less easy to engage and more guarded with their responses in comparison to primary school pupils.

The teachers commented on the young people's interest and engagement – describing them as captivated, engrossed and absorbed. Primary school children sustaining their focus over the 2-hour TIE performance can be seen as a good indicator. Physical reactions such as moving, leaning forward, getting closer to the stage to get a better view were seen as signs of the engagement as were being 'very very quiet'. Even giggling or laughing might be understood as reaction to an unknown experience and possibly feeling a little bit uneasy, not quite knowing what to make of the performance.

Evaluator Observation

At one performance a fire alarm caused quite a long interruption. It was remarkable how the children switched back into the play, as if there had been no break - they were excited – open mouthed. The level of engagement was maintained through this very long and drastic interruption, which teachers often say children can't do.

b) Our evaluation evidence demonstrates that the pupils responded well to Big Brum's approach

Quotations from teachers

"..... the mini workshops in between (the performance)the children draw a lot from that it drew them into the play, into the discussion."

"It was nice getting them up at the end, taking their answers to the characters ... that was really powerful, they will definitely remember that."

"It was good that the discussion had a practical element i.e. they had the carrier bag, or they went onto the scene and laying down. I think that was good, to make them more involved in the performance."

"When the director was there at the beginning, it was like he was talking to them as a friend, I think that.... helped them to relax a bit ..."

"The workshop was a very safe and open environment for them to ask questions and they were encouraged to do that."

The teachers commented how Big Brum's TIE approach affected the pupils. Nearly all teachers liked the workshop sessions breaking up the performances, allowing the children to review what they had seen, as well as the way questions were asked i.e. open ended and having no right or wrong answer. The actors listened, allowed time to think and checked that they had understood correctly, frequently challenging replies. Some teachers commented on the visual and straightforward language and style and how activities like talking to the actors in role or re-enacting certain scenes were drawing the pupils further in.

Evaluator Observation

In one of the primary schools, the pupils did not just offer more and more suggestions but were reflecting and building on each other's responses. Ideas were listened to and developed. The pupils were not trying to find the answer they thought the teacher was looking for but were developing ideas from other children's contributions.

3.2 Impact on Pupils

In this section, we consider how Big Brum's work has (i) enhanced young people's personal, social and emotional development, (ii) helped young people think through complex issues and (ii) enabled young people to use language, images and drama to articulate that cognitive and emotional understanding.

3.2.1 How has Big Brum's work enhanced the pupils' personal, social and emotional development

c) **Our evaluation evidence shows that the pupils engaged emotionally**

Quotations from pupils

Rumpelstiltskin

"I felt like crying when the girl could not spin the wheel. This was very sad."

"When the girl (and Rumpelstiltskin) made a deal, it was a deal, but it was horrible when Rumpelstiltskin tried to take the baby"

Flee

"It was kind of touching – made me think about myself and how I am and what I do."

"At the end of the play when both of the boys were hiding and a person was in the forest with them. It made me feel touched as the boys have no-one helping them in this time"

Emotional engagement was observed during the *Rumpelstiltskin* performances by teachers and expressed by the young people themselves during TIE workshops and the later evaluation sessions as well as in their written work and images. Some teachers felt that emotional engagement was also expressed in physical reactions such as facial expressions (covering the face, eyes or ears), recoiling or checking for the reactions of teachers and peers. The pupils were able to physically explore some of the emotions by re-enacting certain scenes and through access to the stage.

In the *Flee* performances, the teachers commented that emotional engagement was apparent in young people's answers and comments, that they had invested in the narrative and cared about what was happening. During the discussions and in the drawings and written work about *Flee*, generated in the feedback sessions facilitated by the evaluation team, primary and secondary pupils talked about feeling emotionally engaged, connected or touched. They felt sorry, sad, worried or even scared and some said they felt hatred and were angry.

d) Our evaluation evidence demonstrates that the pupils show empathy.

Quotations from pupils

Rumpelstiltskin

"Maybe she does not have any people around, so she makes the doll."

"She made a promise to Rumpelstiltskin and maybe she is upset about that."

"She felt lonely because no one was with her and she needed help."

Flee

"I think they felt scared because, when Bilal woke up, he did not know where he was. And then when Sam came he looked kind of scared."

"I think they felt that everybody is against them and no one is with them. Their parents are against them."

"At the end when Bilal and Sam were going to be caught, I felt upset because I had the feeling something bad was going to happen to them."

In the *Rumpelstiltskin* TIE performances, the primary school teachers noted the pupils empathised and could relate to the characters, their feelings and intentions, even the ones that could not articulate why. They talked about and explored those feelings and wanted to help. They developed an emotional attachment to the girl. The *Flee* performance gave young people a chance to explore empathy. Most apparent from the pupils' comments during the feedback sessions is a degree of understanding of the emotional relevance of the situation. A number of primary and secondary pupils commented that they were grateful for what they have – i.e. a home, parents or living in the UK.

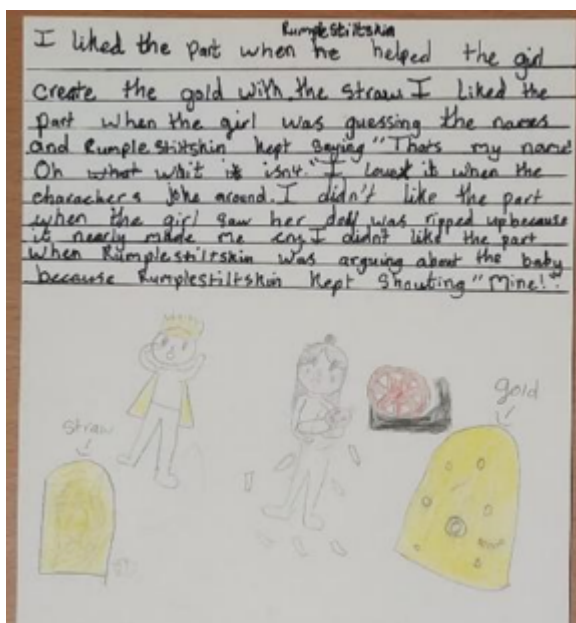


Figure 1, Rumpelstiltskin Year 4

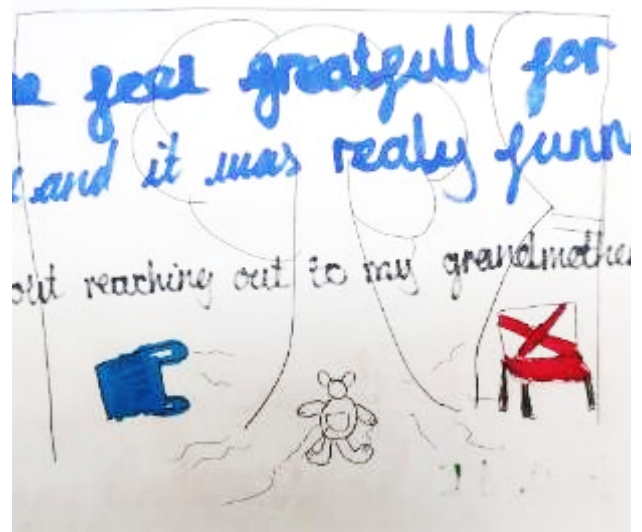


Figure 2, Flee, Year 8

Evaluator Observation

In another school a pupil reflected that he could relate with Bilal not having seen his father and mother in a really long time and it can be scary because he is a little boy. The pupils went into very deep debates about the two boys' behaviour and trying to understand where it came from.

- e) **Our evaluation evidence shows that the story was seen by teachers to reflect the children's own situations and pupils were able to relate parts of the story to themselves and others.**

Quotations from pupils

Flee

"Before the new person came to our classroom I did not think they'd be friends. But surprisingly they were. Because he was hanging out with the cool people. And like me and my friends were just sitting away but surprisingly he came to be our friend. So, it's like Bilal and Sam."

"Sometimes I felt like Sam because sometimes my dad would hurt me and get angry because he has anger problems. But he goes to now and he's better"

"I felt like Bilal when my step mum fell over and I did not know what to do."

The *Rumpelstiltskin* performances generated few direct references to the pupils' own situation, however, based on what they said, teachers thought that some of the pupils were using experiences from their own lives, how they felt and their own values. Children talked about the character's lives, how it was different from the own. One teacher thought that some of the responses, for example 'maybe someone had died', were definitely a situation or concept they had come across – in their family or on television. Considering moral questions like 'should the baby know her story' they were thinking about themselves.

The introduction of the *Flee* performances, asking young people if they have ever been lost and about the difference of 'being lost' and 'feeling lost' created an immediate connection to their own lives. In the feedback sessions and in their written responses, many pupils referred to the being lost or feeling lost (in the supermarket/park/on holiday). Some made wider connections relating the play to their own lives by talking about dreaming of mum when away from home ('like Bilal is dreaming about his father') or unexpectedly becoming friends with someone. Two children contributed their experience about not knowing what to do in emergency situations and another child revealed that she felt like Sam, having sometimes been hurt by her father.³

³ The class teacher was informed of the child's comment, re. safeguarding.

A number of teachers, after the *Flee* performances, mentioned that their pupils come from all over the world and might well have similar backgrounds and experiences to the characters in the story. One commented that the miscommunication in the story reflects some of the problems between different language groups in the school. A boy talking about how the dad's behaviour in the play was rubbing off on his son, who would end up copying him, was noticed by one teacher. The teacher interpreted this as a direct connection to the boy's home life, knowing that his father and brother were in prison.

Evaluator Observation

In one primary school the pupils were shouting out about the gold in excitement but reacted also critically to the king's greed and the marriage proposal. Some girls got quite outraged and responded with noise to the events, they were very emotional. The pupils were in two minds about the girl becoming queen, recognising it as the girl being sold. The pupils grappled with the concept of being rich as a good thing, but that here it involved a child marriage.

During a Flee performance in a school with high proportion of South Asian pupils a few boys were very emotionally invested in the character Bilal. They spoke up for him at every opportunity. It seemed that there was something about him that caused them to feel protective of him. It could be because Bilal is a Muslim name and therefore they instantly felt a kinship with the character.

3.2.2 How has this work helped young people think through complex issues (use higher order thinking skills)?

f) Our evaluation evidence shows that the pupils' responses indicated the use of higher level thinking skills

Quotations from teachers

"They wanted to explain what they thought, what was happening and questioned what they had seen, how and why."

"The actors got them to think, it was deep thinking."

"Anything like this makes them think a little bit different, opens doorways and makes them talk a bit more than they normally would."

"(Bilal and Sam) building a prison inside themselves – that kind of thought process we did not expect from them, ... very complex, ... they are realising that the person is fundamentally broken."

Teachers indicated that pupils took part in the discussions and expressed their opinions during the TIE workshop sessions of the *Rumpelstiltskin* performances. They further commented that

many of the pupils' responses were thoughtful and reflective, with some deep thinking taking place. The pupils picked up ideas from each other and developed them, made predictions and reasoned, making suggestions to help the girl/queen. The actors encouraged them to expand their thoughts.

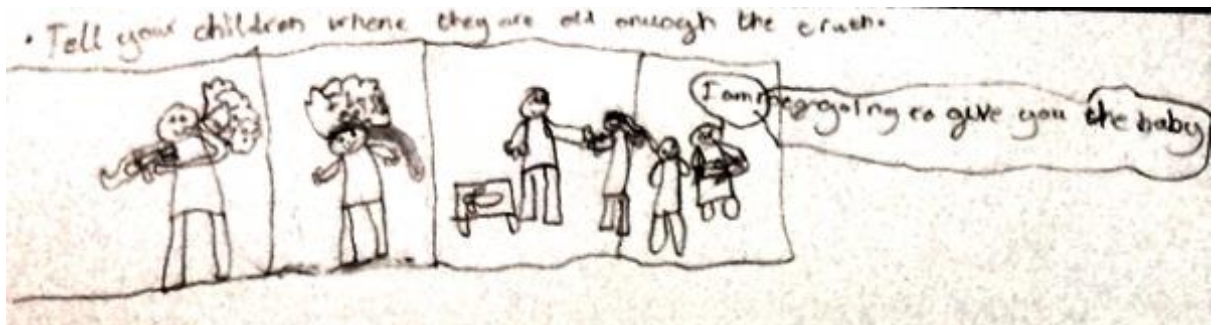


Figure 3, Rumpelstiltskin, Year 2, Tell the children when they are old enough the truth.

Quotations from pupils

Rumpelstiltskin

"She should not make the same mistakes as her father"

"Because the toy has been ripped up – she can't remember her childhood"

Flee

"People are judging others without knowing their backgrounds, problems and feelings."

"Knowing what others go through ... could change a lot of people's lives."

"One can be friends no matter your background."

"It's mad to think people actually live like this and that things like this can actually happen. A parent can actually leave their child in another country not knowing if they are safe or not."

Evaluator Observation

In the introduction sequence to the Rumpelstiltskin performance the children had watched the miller's daughter making a paper doll, whispering to and cradling it. This was followed by a discussion about why she made the doll and what it meant to the girl. The pupil's response such as 'reminding her of mother' or having no other friends were picked up again by the children later in the performance when she gave doll to Rumpelstiltskin and when he ripped it apart in anger.

Some pupils' responses during the TIE workshops that showed imaginative personalisation or investment of personal energy into an object (*'the doll was herself and she put her life into it'*), as well as interpreting and applying the meaning of the story (*'the girl should not make the same mistakes as her father'*) were seen by the teachers as evidence of complex thinking.

Concerning Big Brum's *Flee* performances, the teachers felt that the pupils were given the opportunity to think, that the play made children consider fundamental human questions. Some primary teachers were surprised and delighted by the depth of the discussions and the children's interpretation of scenes.

Overall, young people were exercising complex and abstract thinking about what it meant to be in the characters' position and what could happen, why he might be doing something and what they would have done in that situation. They were thinking and comparing the very different perspectives of the characters, who they thought is wrong or who they felt sorry for, who to help or not to help and about who is more wrong, more in danger and more lost.

Responses from the pupils in the workshops facilitated by the evaluation team considered the characters being or feeling lost and that the characters didn't know how to express themselves and what to do. Several young people considered that the characters, while coming from very different backgrounds have something in common '*so different but so connected*'. Thinking about themselves and what they might do, the pupils appear to draw conclusions, engage in metacognitive thinking and make moral judgments. There were comments about friendships and people being strong together but weak alone.

Evaluator Observation:

In one Rumpelstiltskin performance in a primary school, the children investigated the symbolism of the gold as wealth and what it means : "The king might belong to the gold, the king can't live without the gold". "The gold owns the King". The pupils were unafraid to question the value of being rich, did it come at a price? They reflected on values in our society that are not commonly questioned in Primary School outside of programmes such as Philosophy for Children.

In a Flee performance, two girls were discussing how Sam's upbringing and the terrible relationship with his father, affected his ability to form a friendship with Bilal. Sam had been continually rejected. In the workshops the pupils introduced different ideas and were interested to investigate them. It was clear that they were thinking through the performance and not merely reporting back what they had seen. The pupils used very expressive language. It appears as though the play prompted them to use very precise language to describe what they had witnessed and their thoughts. They were really thinking about the play in great depth and their feelings associated with it.

3.2.3 How have young people used language, images and drama to articulate that cognitive and emotional understanding?

g) Our evaluation evidence shows that the pupils used language, images and drama to express emotions and understanding

Quotations from pupils

Rumpelstiltskin

"She was petrified because she did not want to go to the king's castle because she had to make more gold"

Flee

"The bag is much more in the play' (than a bag)."

"The teddy represents hope and peace."

"In Flee they were not friends at the start – in Macbeth they were friends at the start but not at the end. – the plays are basically the opposite"

"... the bag is his identity, his self, it holds not shopping but the marks he makes on the ground, it holds his whole self."

"He is reaching for friendship and is given a bond."

"The bag is holding him down like shackles from his dreams and aspirations – it is protecting his idea of perfect."

Language

The concept of the different meanings of being or feeling lost, discussed in the introduction of the *Flee* play appears in many of the young people's workshop comments. Similarly, images of the first scene, Bilal sleeping on a bench, with a plastic bag tight to his feet, reaching out for something, is reflected in the TIE discussions, feedback comments, writing and drawn work. The *Flee* performances also provided the pupils with opportunities to explore language – playing with unusual words such as random, spiteful, astonished or '*the boys were in harmony*' in the primary classes. Noticeable words in the secondary classes included distraught, audacity, flabbergasted, obliterated and sorrow. However, while one teacher thought the young people were trying to see if the words fitted, another questioned whether stock phrases from the curriculum were being used.

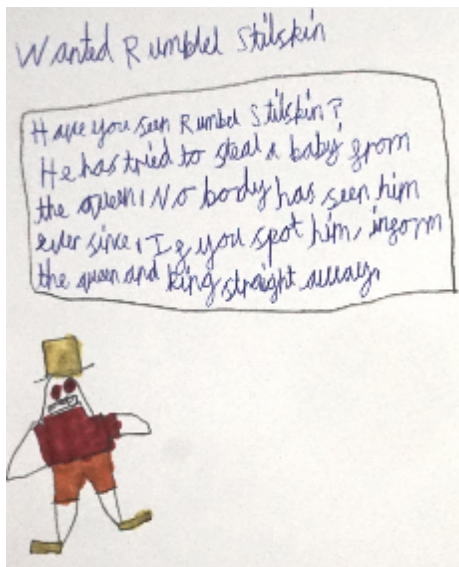


Figure 4, Rumpelstiltskin, Year 4

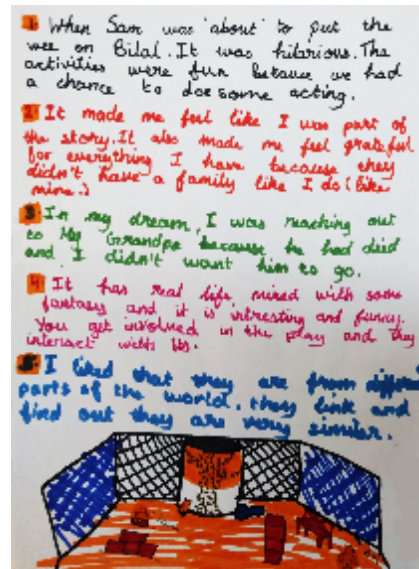


Figure 5, Flee, Year 6

Images

The teachers noticed that certain scenes such as tearing the doll, name guessing and revealing the gold captivated the children during the *Rumpelstiltskin* performances and were repeated in colourful drawings i.e. showing Rumpelstiltskin with pointed hat, the queen sometimes with paper doll or baby and heaps of straw/gold. Other frequently occurring images included those of the castle, spinning wheel and the cradle. The drawings pupils produced after the *Flee* performances reflected issues discussed in the TIE workshops, scenes with high drama and the visually strong stage set. There were many scenes of figures on benches with outstretched arms, the crate-shelter structure, trees/forest but also drawings of the phone and boys fighting each other. These memorable scenes can be attributed to the way Big Brum crafted the drama.⁴



Figure 6, Rumpelstiltskin, Year 4



Figure 7, Flee, Year 8

⁴ Reintelt et al (2014) in 'Critical Mass: Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution' set out ways in which people's memory of theatre performances correlates with how they perceive its value.

Drama

Regarding expression through drama - the format of interrupting the performance and getting the children to speak with the characters in the *Rumpelstiltskin* TIE workshops was liked by the teachers and thought of as powerful, making the children part of the play. The secondary school teachers commented that young people were literally able to step into the characters' shoes and experience how it feels, which makes it more real. These teachers felt that some pupils would prefer drama as a medium of expression. One teacher said she could see that when pupils were re-enacting, they were really concentrating and visualising something.



Figure 8,
Rumpelstiltskin, year 4
Children talking about stories they know.

3.2.4 Marked or noticeable impact on particular pupils or groups of pupils..

h) Our evaluation evidence shows that Big Brum's work had noticeable impact on normally disengaged or difficult pupils

Quotations from teachers

"One of the children said she (the queen) should say sorry. That child used to be difficult to manage. He would not ever accept he is at fault. For him to say we need to apologise is a big thing, a total turn around, and to say this out loud in front of everybody else, I feel that was huge."

"There is a boy with ADHD who would normally be calling out and not be able to sit still – you would not have noticed."

"...there was a group of pretty quiet boys ... they really were talking detailed things. They were really coming out of their shell and they were offering some very intense ideas."

"...two student who can be quite disruptive ... they were, very thoughtful, very reflective and came out with some of those poignant comments. Those two students really stood out to me. ... because they were on par with the other reactions of studentThey contributed just as much as everybody else."

Many of the teachers noticed a number of pupils that were normally not likely to engage or offer contributions, taking part in the workshops. They also noticed engagement and participation of children with impairments (hearing), behavioural issues and special needs such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Only very few individual children did not want to or were unable to engage with the performances.

3.3 Extended Learning Projects

The brief assessment below is based on the evaluation team attending a planning session and the final evaluation meetings for both extended projects and observing one end of project event. Other than the Romeo and Juliet final session the evaluation team had no direct contact with the pupils.

Rumpelstiltskin

Quotations from pupils

“He ripped her favourite thing – her friend, her mother, her life”

“Queen, you still cry because you are angry with your father, because he left you and never came back.”

“Last night the queen had a baby boy in the throne room. In the afternoon the imp was watching the queen as she held her baby – it was said he was singing a song.”

The teachers talked about children being very engaged. There was an overall improvement in the children’s personal and social confidence, as well as their speaking skills. The teachers noted that pupils were using their imagination to explore ‘why people do things’. There is evidence of empathy in the written work. One exercise, relating to the paper doll in the play, asking young people about their own most precious objects, enabled them to talk about personal issues. One child, for example, revealed he was adopted, which the teachers were not aware of before. The exercise on writing a newspaper article about a scene and character in the play also enabled more complex thinking and improved writing skills.

Romeo and Juliet

Quotations from pupils

“You need to understand how she expresses feelings but not saying words.”

“If Rosie is not helped it will end badly, she might harm herself, get into trouble”

“She probably had a reason for ripping the dictionary, the head teacher should give her a second chance, something could have happened in school”

“As a parent you have responsibility to know how she is feeling, spend time with her, something as simple as watching tv together “

The teachers commented that the children showed empathy and gained a deeper understanding of characters through the different workshop session and written work. The children learned to transfer empathy to other situations easily, and to articulate their own learning. The teachers believed that children genuinely identified with the main character and related the story to their own lives such as talking about times when they themselves felt confused, alone or lonely. An in-character exercise towards the end of the programme was successful in enabling the pupils to further strongly identify with the needs of the character, imagine the consequences if the character was not helped and think deeply and discussed possible solutions.

Regarding language, the teachers had noticed a lower than expected ability range for one class at the start of the project, however, at the end of the year, due to Big Brum's and other interventions, the children had taken a big leap, performing now the same or better than the previous year around questioning, debating, speaking and listening. Most of the children were on their way to reach 65-75% of age-related expectations. This compared with 63% in the previous cohort.

Evaluator Observation

For the final sessions of the Romeo and Juliet extended project, which had transferred parts of the original play into a contemporary setting, the children were to meet Rosie's (Juliet's) father (played by a Big Brum team member). He had been summoned by the head teacher of Rosie's school to discuss her possible expulsion, as she had been caught tearing a page out of a dictionary in the school's library. The children were asked to help the father on how to talk to the head teacher and avoid the expulsion.

The Director explained that the project was about – 'Rosie becomes the centre of concern for the class - she is them, she is the safe space from which to explore themselves, her situation reflects their own - the class is learning to help themselves, individually and socially'

The children acted in role and took the task seriously. They were worried about meeting the father in case he was 'nasty' but at the same time considered not wanting to offend him. They offered a number of thoughts regarding Rosie's state of mind and reasons for ripping the book. They questioned the father about his relationship to his daughter and considered the consequences if he was not able to help her. They also offered advice on what to discuss with the head teacher.

It was very noticeable that children, having identified with Rosie, put their points forward with certainty, forcefulness and sometimes even anger.

4 Issues and Lessons Learned

This section discusses the issues and lessons learned from the findings above in relation to how Big Brum could further strengthen its relationships with schools, as well as continue to develop its methodology on data collection and evaluation.

4.1 Big Brum's Approach to Schools

TIE Tours and Extended Learning Projects

The TIE performances are one off events of two hours duration booked by schools. Often the booking is not done by the class teacher and sometimes during the performance the class teacher is unable to attend and is replaced by someone else. The teachers may or may not be well briefed and learning outcomes are rarely discussed beforehand. Hence, although the evaluation has demonstrated that the tour performances have had significant impact on the pupils, it is problematic to determine the value or depth of the impact. It is also difficult for the teachers to run follow up sessions, as the performances were often treated as a one-off and not part of an integrated teaching programme.

The extended learning projects, however, require a high level of collaboration and commitment from schools. There is a close working relationship with teachers- to agree the specific purpose of the project and outcomes regarding curriculum and attainment targets and/or specific aspects of pupil's academic personal, emotional or social development. The extended learning projects, where the pupils are engaged over several sessions, also allow the teachers and Big Brum to better assess a slightly longer term impact, i.e. changes on pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attainments. The success in improving language skills and personal and social confidence from the 2 extended learning projects should be further developed by Big Brum.

Disengaged or Difficult Pupils

It is clear from the findings that Big Brum's TIE approach works well for the large majority of children. The teachers had also noted that a number of pupils that were normally not likely to engage or offer contributions, were taking part in the workshops. This is an interesting finding as it suggests that Big Brum's could design specific TIE programs targeted at helping especially shy/quiet and pupils with special needs.

However, some teachers also noted that there were a very few individual pupils that did not want to, could not cope or were unable to engage with the performances. There is insufficient data to ascertain why. Although the number is very small, Big Brum might consider developing additional strategies on how to involve with such pupils.

Very Young Pupils

Teachers from the younger age groups i.e. Years 1 and 2 for the *Rumpelstiltskin* tour and one Year 5 teacher regarding a *Flee* performance commented that some content and concepts might be too difficult for their children. They thought that children had not understood the story or certain parts of the story. They felt that more needed to be explained and that some

pupils' responses were superficial. These teachers thought that children struggled to explain and to put ideas and opinions into words.

However, many of the primary and secondary school teachers commented that they were surprised about level of children's engagement, the depth of their responses in discussing serious and emotional issues. '*... they were not as young as you think they are*'. This posed the question if some teachers might have underestimated the pupils and attempted to protect them from difficult issues. Big Brum should consider how to ensure that the youngest groups it is working with, are as fully on board as the older children. More collaborative work and discussion with the teachers would also be helpful.

The Teacher Role in TIE

A critical factor that emerges from the findings is the crucial role of the teachers in ensuring the effectiveness of Big Brum's work on the pupils' experience. The better the quality of teachers' support, preparation and follow-up the greater the impact on the pupils. On an extended learning project, the engagement of the teachers in preparation and follow up is not an issue. However, for the limited contact time during a short performance tour, more thoughts are needed on how best to prepare the teachers and how they might continue to build on the work.

4.2 Evaluation Methodology

Framing and authenticity of pupils' responses

Throughout the two-year project there were discussions about the authenticity of responses received from the pupils and how much this was influenced by the framing of tasks and the context in which they were made. Pupils responded inside the structures provided by the teachers and the evaluation team. The responses from the pupils might therefore reflect the feedback activity rather than the TIE performance itself. There is also the risk that the pupils would respond according to what they think the teacher or facilitator wants to hear.

Hence, to mitigate bias, Big Brum has adopted a methodology of triangulating feedback from several sources to gauge the impact on the pupils. The evaluators workshop sessions with the pupils and the resulting materials and notes is one source and was considered together with the teachers' interviews and class exercises by the Interpretation Groups.

The role of teachers in the evaluation process

Evaluation methodologies for assessing changes in behaviour and attitude should ideally include pre-assessment to establish baselines from which improvements can be measured. As this approach was not possible, given the constraints of the project, the observations and assessments of the teachers in identifying any changes in their pupils become critical, either during the performances, the TIE workshops or when interpreting the images and writings produced by the children. The depth of information received from interviews based on the teachers' understanding and knowledge of their classes was invaluable.

However, it was generally difficult to obtain more time commitment from the teachers. One major factor is that the teachers had busy work schedule and they work under intense time

pressure and often focuses/driven by curriculum requirements . Another factor is that the teacher that commissioned the performance may not be the teacher that observe the performance with the pupils. Interviews had to be kept short and the response rate from self-completion questionnaires was very low.

Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria applied for assessing the impact of *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Flee* on the pupils were open ended. For example, one of the evaluation questions was '*How has this work enhanced young people's personal, social and emotional development?*'. Open ended evaluations are useful in providing qualitative narratives However, to further understand the impact of Big Brum's work, especially with education attainment, it will be necessary to seek greater collaboration with schools, where metrics for tracking pupils' development are already in place.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The overall conclusion is that pupils have generally gained a greater felt understanding of themselves and the world through their work with Big Brum. There is ample evidence from performance observations, the drawings, written work from workshop sessions, as well as from interviews with the teachers that the pupils were emotionally engaged, had exercised higher thinking skills and were able to use language, images and drama to articulate that cognitive and emotional understanding.

The teachers noted that the TIE workshops during the performances drew the pupils further in and acting out some of the scenes enabled the pupils to step into the shoes of the characters thereby enabling them to imagine what was going on. Teachers liked that the performances were broken up with TIE workshop sessions, which built a thread of ideas and thoughts and created space for expanding thinking and giving opportunity to ask questions. There was a high level of inclusive learning that enabled engagement and participation.

The open and friendly approach of actors was noted, especially the ability to create a safe environment for exploring difficult and deep issues. They commented that it was '*real theatre*', which would normally be outside the experience of the pupils. The teachers also felt that the Big Brum's productions were able to convey complex issues in an accessible way that the pupils could enjoy and relate to. Teachers said they were surprised about the depth of the children's responses, '*realising that they were not as young as you think they are*', having to discuss things that were quite serious and very emotional.

The comments from teachers in the two extended projects further reinforce the findings above. The teachers agreed that the pupils' personal and social confidence, empathy and especially language skills had increased. The pupils were able to relate the story to their own lives, identify with the needs of the character and imagine the consequences if the character was not helped. They were able to articulate their own learning, think deeply and discussed possible solutions.

It is recommended that Big Brum further develop the following:

- a) Although the two-hour performances with TIE workshops have considerable impact on the emotional and personal development of pupils, the impact on learners is more assured on the extended TIE programmes. Hence, Big Brum should make more effort to engage schools in longer TIE programmes.
- b) Big Brum should continue working with teachers and schools to utilise existing attainment metrics for assessing impact and, if needed, establish more vigorous methods for evaluating measurable changes in behaviour or attitudes and improvement in cognitive skills, emotional development and social development. Big Brum should work towards developing tools to capture longer term impact.
- c) The involvement and understanding of teachers regarding the value of TIE is essential to ensure that the impacts on the pupils are understood, followed up and further developed accordingly. Big Brum should continue to work in partnership with schools on longer term projects that involve sustained and in-depth work with teachers, including collaborating on how they prepare for and follow-up TIE work, and on observing and analysing pupils' responses to it.
- d) The impact of Big Brum's work on under-achieving, disengaged or disinterested and pupils with special needs should be further developed and researched.
- e) While the responses from the pupils demonstrate the value of young people's voices in providing evidence for impact evaluation, Big Brum should undertake more research to further develop quality procedures that ensure the questions used and the tasks set for pupils to do during evaluation exercises are not biased and that pupils are not responding to a perceived script or saying what they think the facilitator wants to hear.
- f) Teachers are generally very busy and one lesson learned during the evaluation process was that the semi structured interview method with an agreed time frame and concise questions is the most effective way for obtaining assessments from the teachers. The low response to emailed questionnaire indicates that feedback from teachers is best not conducted in this way.

Annex A: The External Evaluation Team

The Consortium

- **People and Organisation Ltd**, a Birmingham based public service management consultancy with many years of practical experience in supporting public institutions, civil society organisation and enterprises. We deliver policy development, institution strengthening, organisation development and change programs, as well as capacity building, strategic planning, business planning and project design, monitoring and evaluation.
- **Iris Bertz Ltd** specialises in the arts & education. Working for over twenty years as a practitioner in schools and over 5 years as a Creative Agent to advise schools on how to utilise the Arts better in improving engagement & results. We also work with European partners on using drama and art in education, as well as mentoring young people in different stages of their education and developed apprenticeships in the Creative Sector in the UK.
- **Strawberry Words** (formerly Harvey Arts), an arts education company, focuses on improving social mobility through developing use of the English language and on improving community cohesion with all ages using the performing arts. We regularly work in schools nationally, delivering anti-racism and cultural awareness programmes such as Birmingham Road, Them and Us and Big Centre TV's Miss Icy workshops (focus on Caribbean culture).

The External Evaluation Team

Jutta Stahlhacke has over 17 years' experience working as a consultant with public and third sector organisations. She worked in organisation analysis and development, business planning and capacity building projects as well as on project evaluations, numerous community consultation for regeneration and parks development project, feasibility studies and a Social Return on Investment study. Jutta is very experienced in designing and implementing participative methods as well as analysing and communicating survey and evaluation results. Jutta has been a Princes Trust business mentor since 2009, supporting businesses set up by young people, including design, dance, singer/voice training and supplementary tuition businesses. She is very keen on bringing a design discipline and interactive techniques that enables children, young people and disadvantaged groups to articulate their own needs and criteria for their development.

Iris Bertz is an artist and creative development professional with 16 years' experience in the creative sector in the West Midlands. Iris is a consultant who works with the Arts to make them more relevant to outside organisations. Coming from Germany she sees the clear value of TIE and the arts in schools to improve learning. Having worked as a Creative Agent for Black Country Creative Partnerships and Brightspace with over 20 schools from Nursery to Secondary, she has actively worked on finding ways to improve learning and the school experience for children and young people. She has worked with the Crafts Council on developing crafts Worker as school practitioners and as Project Manager (Creative Alliance) on apprenticeships in the creative sector, including schools. She is keen to help people develop a common language when working across sectors and enabling practitioners to communicate with teachers and decision makers more effectively to bring across the value of their work.

Rebecca Hemmings has worked in the theatre and arts education industry for the last 20 years in a variety of roles for a plethora of organisations. These roles include working as an actress for the Queens Theatre Hornchurch, an Education Arts Practitioner in The Royal Shakespeare Company between 2006 – 2010, a theatre practitioner for The Birmingham Hippodrome, a teacher trainer in Cultural Awareness in partnership with Birmingham City Council and as a practitioner in Sister Tree Theatre Company. From 2003 – 2009 Rebecca ran Harvey Arts. An arts organisation that specialised in creating fun opportunities for learning for hard to reach communities. Most of their work was in schools. Rebecca won an award from Coventry University for her work on promoting diversity in schools in 2015. She is passionate about making change and continues to use her work to highlight cultural injustice and help create solutions. She is highly aware of the challenges in working with schools and is actively involved in networks, for example, the Culture Education Partnership, working to face the current challenges.

Dr Yeow Poon is a highly experienced organisation development specialist. He has worked on numerous projects in the public, private and voluntary sector in the UK and internationally. His areas of expertise include organisation analysis, strategic and change management, business planning, capacity building and collaboration. He has designed and undertaken evaluations for development projects in Vietnam, worked on a Social Return on Investment project for Trident Reach and a review of business development options for BArts. He has also contributed to the design and analysis of community consultation and evaluation projects in regeneration, parks re-development and more recently the Community Champions Programme in Birmingham. Yeow is the Chair of the Chinese Community Centre Birmingham and the President of the England China Business Forum and has served as a Board member for Bournville College and the West Midlands Ethnic Minority Business Forum. He has led the Chinese Community Centre in establishing a Community Interest Company in response to the changing funding climate and is the main driver of ChinaWestMidlands 2020, a cross-cultural arts initiative .