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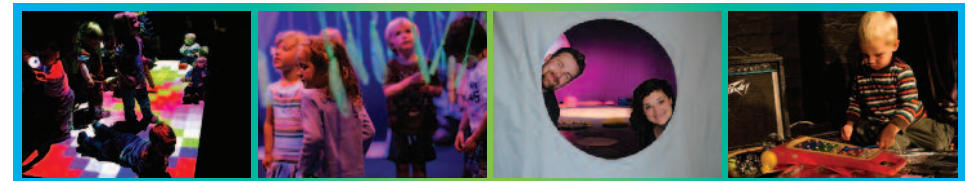
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LIVE ARTS / ARTS ALIVE

STARCATCHERS RESEARCH REPORT 2011



SUMMARY REPORT

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UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE



ALBA CHRUTHACHAIL

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Starcatchers is part of the
Small Size UK Micro-Network through
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Starcatchers was a project
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Starcatchers Project Partners



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We thank the children, their families and communities at the heart of the project, and the four venues hosting the Artists in Residence:

Hazel Darwin-Edwards: Byre Theatre, St Andrews

Katy Wilson: Tramway, Glasgow

Matt Addicott: Platform, Easterhouse

Sacha Kyle: Carnegie Hall, Dunfermline

REPORTING THE STARCATCHERS PROJECT

The Starcatchers Research Project Summary Report draws from the Starcatchers Research Project Main Report which is available on Starcatchers Productions Website: www.starcatchers.org.uk/research/

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

The Starcatchers Project achievements include:

- Four year long residences, one each at the Tramway in Glasgow, Platform in Easterhouse, The Byre in St Andrews and ATTfife and Carnegie Hall in Fife
- Participation of nearly 16,000 people
- Production of 18 original arts related performance pieces
- 286 performances and workshops
- Involvement of 60 associated artists, connecting them to work with young children
- Development work with 12 early childhood settings
- An international symposium attracting delegates from across Scotland, the UK, Europe and the rest of the World
- Presentation at International Conferences: Australian Early Childhood Conference, Adelaide, Australia; the World Organisation for Preschool Education (OMEPE) Conference in Gothenburg; International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network Conference at the ASSITEJ Congress, Malmo, the Scottish Learning Festival 2010, Early Years as an Awesome Experience Conference, Cork, Theater 0-4 Symposium, Rotterdam, Natural Born Artists Conference at Babaro Festival, Galway
- A series of Starcatchers Network Events sharing information and good practice with early years professionals from different sectors including health, education and the arts
- Attendance at festivals in Galway, Bologna, Malmo, Paris, Charlerois, Almere
- A Project Manager who has built on the experience of the Starcatchers Pilot Project by furthering her knowledge of production, management, early years practice, continuing professional development, the importance of research evidence, conference presentation and project dissemination
- Development of the Starcatchers Model which gives principles, structure, form and value to the unique role of working creatively with the very youngest children and consequently their families, carers and communities
- A research model based on a theoretical framework that embraces the agency of the child, the artist and performance itself by ensuring participant voice and reflective enquiry and action
- The positioning of the Starcatchers Model as different from but in relation to Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA).



INTRODUCTION TO THE STARCATCHERS RESEARCH PROJECT

Starcatchers is an innovative project which works in partnership with artists, arts venues, child-care settings and families to experiment artistically with audiences of very young children, to encourage their participation and to develop exciting, inspiring performing arts experiences for children, aged 0-4. Four artists in residence have each worked for a year in one of four theatre venues in Scotland to engage children and families in a range of arts related performance experiences.

Starcatchers was funded for a two year period through the Creative Scotland National Lottery Inspire Fund and delivers creative and meaningful events for the here and now, as well as providing experiences that may make a difference in the longer term. The Starcatchers Project brings a unique focus to such efforts by offering arts based experiences to parents and very young children together, focusing on the present value of such engagement whilst recognising the longer term impact of positive creative family experiences, that lead to understanding the Starcatchers work in terms of a value for money investment for the future.

Over the two years of the Starcatchers funded project there have been three phases. The first phase followed the award from the Creative Scotland National Lottery Inspire Fund in which relationships were nurtured with hosting venues, a steering group was set up, detailed project planning was developed, artists in residence were recruited and formed relationships,

and the research team was appointed. The four accompanying action researchers were each attached to one venue and have collaborated with the artists to observe children's engagement, provide feedback, discuss ongoing work, and record the processes of project development.

The hallmark of the second phase was the residencies. Four artists, each with a different set of experiences, moved from the early beginnings, through development and production in cycles of experimentation, feedback, reflection and new action. Alongside the artists were four matched researchers, whose role was to observe, to listen, to discuss and to reflect on the arts related experiences offered by the particular artist. Contact between artists, researchers, participating venues, early childhood settings, the steering group, funders, the website and evaluation were all skilfully navigated by the Project Manager. The lead researcher had the task to: support the research team, facilitate group meetings between researchers and the artists as practitioners and action researchers, and to participate in Steering Group meetings. The contact between artists and researchers is analogous to a community of enquiry – and this has strengthened as the residency year has gone on. The contact between the artists in residence and the shared work in each of their collaborative projects can be understood as communities of practice.

The documentation of the creative and practical processes that the artists were involved in is an important aspect of the legacy of the Starcatchers project.

The third phase has included further documentation, collation and analysis of data, writing up and reporting, continuing

performance, reflection and development of the Starcatchers' legacy leading to the creation of Starcatchers Productions.

A Growing Up in Scotland (2010) report proposes that skewed maternal-child attachment may affect the mother child relationship and their interactions – both in nature and quality. Experiences that support mothers with mental health problems have the potential to have an impact on children's development and well-being. In Scotland there is widespread support for the strong political agenda focusing on the outcomes of providing for small children and their families and a will to create change. By starting early – with families pre-birth, our Government hopes to create change for children and families: the Early Years Framework (The Scottish Government, 2009) is supported by a policy to practice initiative called 'Getting it right for every child' (Scottish Government, 2009).



THE ARTISTS AND VENUES

There were four venues and four associated artists in residence, each on a year's residency. The Starcatchers Artists were briefed to create at least one performance during their residencies, however each artist surpassed expectations by creating a number of performances or experiences during their tenure. By project completion there were eighteen different pieces as shown below.



PLATFORM



- Cloud Factory
- Elf Experiment
- First Light
- This Sucks|This Workshop Sucks1
- The Incredible Swimming Choir

TRAMWAY



- Sprog Rock
- Multi Coloured Blocks from Space
- Sproglit
- Will You Be My Guinea Pig?
- This Sucks|This Workshop Suck2
- Ice Pole

THE BYRETHEATRE

- Round in Circles
- The Attic
- Shake N Bake
- Space Dust



CARNEGIE HALL /ATTFIFE

- Baby Chill
- Luvhart
- Oops a Daisy
- Shake N Bake
- The Playroom



MATT ADDICOTT –Theatre Maker was based at Platform which is programmed and managed by Glasgow East Arts Company which also runs a broad range of arts outreach activity across the wider area. Platform launched in October 2006 and since then has been recognised for its work in audience development and in particular developing a strong local audience for work with children, young people and families.

“Because it is such a fantastic opportunity to devise theatre for an audience, I really enjoy making work for. I found the experience of performing and being an assistant director on productions for early year’s audiences challenging but rewarding. These projects left me determined to produce some theatre of my own for 0-4 year olds and the Starcatchers job represents a brilliant opportunity to do just that. I was also really keen to work with Platform: I enjoy spending time in the venue and find the ambition and drive of the organisation really exciting”. [Matt]

KATY WILSON, Visual Artist, was based at the Tramway in Glasgow, which has a 20-year history of presenting contemporary performance and visual art. The venue is internationally recognised for its support of the development of risk taking creative practice. It has an extensive catalogue of co-productions which have travelled across the world. There are three programming strands, live art, visual art and education. Katy Wilson’s Starcatchers residency here was supported by the education programme.

I feel liberated by the importance of visuals over words for young children. My work has always had a narrative element, and I can’t wait to create new enticing dream worlds to



be explored. In interacting with my work I hope to spur imagination, inspire, encourage interaction with different people and provoke thought and discussion in others. I want to encourage kids to be kids, and adults to be in touch with their inner child too. I want to be spontaneous and attempt to look at our natural instincts. I am seeking to surprise myself and ultimately to surprise other people. 0-4 year olds are a tough gig! They are as honest as can be..." [Katy]

HAZEL DARWIN-EDWARDS – Puppeteer and Actor was based at **The Byre Theatre** which is situated at St Andrews in the East Neuk of Fife, the Byre plays a key role in the local community and in the Scottish arts community. Children and families are a key focus of the Byre Theatre. Boasting an excellent youth theatre group producing several performances every year, the Byre is also committed to producing work for our youngest audience members, aged 0-4.

"Being a Starcatchers Artist is a dream job for me. I have been really inspired by early years theatre I have seen, read or heard about here in Scotland and abroad. I was also lucky enough to perform a show by Puppet Lab this February in Bath, which played to an audience of under fours and their grown ups, and it sparked a desire to explore the possibilities of creating for this audience further. Performing for babies is very different to the kind of acting that I imagined myself doing when I was at drama college. I love the challenges I now face like 'how do we create work that is meaningful for both the very young child and the adults that come with them?', 'how do we use language?', 'how do we allow and accept their responses in a performance?' – to name just a few!" [Hazel]

SACHA KYLE – Theatre Maker was based at **Carnegie Hall, Dunfermline** and the **Lochgelly Centre** through **On At Fife**, an organisation which promotes and increases participation in the arts and aims to be recognised for excellence in the development of the arts and creativity. On at Fife (formerly Arts and Theatres Trust Fife Ltd (AttFife) is an independent arts organisation set up in 2007 to provide arts, culture and entertainment across Fife. On at Fife manages four theatre venues across Fife and Sacha worked in Dunfermline at Carnegie Hall and with nurseries and groups in Lochgelly where the Lochgelly Centre is located.

"The Starcatchers project enables artists to explore their own artistic ideas while at the same time incorporating and furthering their understanding into children's unique developmental stages and interest in theatre and play. Creating with and for children has always been an artistic passion of mine and Starcatchers aims to challenge what can be created for this age group in a way that directly involves and includes the children and the important people around them – parents, carers and grannies and granddads of course! I am excited by the prospect of this dual collaboration to create tailor-made and unique bespoke pieces of theatre and to further develop my own skills as a theatre director creating work for this age group". [Sacha]



INFORMING THEORY

Young children are constantly 'reading' and interpreting their world – the world as it is viewed but also the world as it is heard, felt and experienced. In practice, and through a theoretical lens, theories about very young children's creativity, competence, socio-cultural processes and child development allow us to appreciate children's contribution to the creative process from the earliest moments of life. The musicality, responsiveness and capacities to instigate action in others, tell us that even very young babies can engage in intentional behaviours. As research in infancy has improved understandings of intersubjectivity of companionships (Hobson, 2002; Trevarthen, 2001, 2002), and the role they play as children grow into and create culture, the place and potential of arts related performance forms of theatre for even the youngest children can be understood better. The good sense of sharing creative endeavour with the youngest children becomes a new way of seeing and increases our confidence in children's capacities as readers of the action.

Bruner (1990, 1996, 2008) describes narratives of thinking and acts of meaning. The modes he offers of enactive, iconic and symbolic acts of meaning in human contexts over time, provide us with a way of understanding what may be going on for children as they recognize, reinterpret and symbolize action. This work is complemented by Margaret Donaldson's re-interpretation of Piaget's ideas about children's perceptions and understandings of concepts held by other minds (1950, 1967). Donaldson (1978, 1992) was clear that if information made 'human sense' to young

children then they could readily take the perspectives of others, make sense of the world and contribute to the culture.

As part of the process of researching and compiling this report, it was important to examine the nature of theatre as an aesthetic and social medium and to attempt to situate theatre for very young children within the more general context of theatre and performance. Therefore, the emphasis for the artists is on child development linked to creative and aesthetic awareness and growth, rather than being focused on more formal educational considerations.

Research engagement demands that researchers address their own principles and values – this leads to the development of a conceptual framework to inform the research process. The main strands that emerged were theories about narrative and acts of meaning (Bruner, 1990); discourse (Gee, 1990); child learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978), Piaget/Donaldson, (1992), Bruner (1996, 2008), Cskszentmihalyi (1990) and Gardner (2004); language codes and pedagogy (Bernstein, 1996); supporting the young child's needs (Trevarthen, 2002); socio-dramatic and also complex play (Smilansky 1968, 1980); theatre and performance, Boal (1995, 2006), Artaud, (1958); agency (Bjerke, 2011; Freire, 1972; Quortrup, 1994); agency and collaboration (Bruner, 1990, 1996, 2008); children's culture Corsaro, (2000; Trevarthen, 2001, 2002); ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986, 1989, 1994); philosophy (Gadamer, 1999) and positioning (Holland and Leander, 2004). This theoretical web interplays across the ways in which children and adults are positioned in the various arts related activities and performance

forms that are embraced by and contribute to the developing models of theatre and performance which are Starcatchers.

Through the collaboration between researchers and artists we identified three narrative voices of action research – the first person of the artist, the second person of the audience and the third person of public contact and advocacy of early years performance related artistic experiences.



AIMS OF THE STARCATCHERS RESEARCH PROJECT

There are two key facets of the research involvement linked to two key Starcatchers Project aims:

AIM 1:

To establish the extent of the success of the Starcatchers project in terms of its contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the place of the arts in general, and participative performance in particular, in the development of young children.

AIM 2:

To provide a framework which will enable the project leaders and, in particular, the Artists in Residence, to engage in an organic development with young children and their families and communities and from this to create a legacy determined by the success of the project in terms of:

- a) the social, creative and cognitive development contribution and participation of the children involved;
- b) the ability of the artists to reflect on, evaluate and develop successful programmes of participative experiences for young children;
- c) the impact on parents and carers and communities surrounding participating children;
- d) the potential of the Starcatchers project to be sustainable over time, with creation of website and resource repository.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions arise from the main aims and research elements identified, these driving questions are:

1. What is the nature of theatre and art-based performance for and with young children?
2. What does the artists' experience of designing and implementing participative performance events tell us about the nature and processes of working with young children in performing arts?
3. What do the children gain as a result of participation in performing arts experiences?
4. What do parents and carers and communities gain as a result of their participation in the arts process and the impact on their children's wellbeing and development?

OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

Most importantly we aim to assess the impact of the Starcatchers experience on children, parents, early childhood professionals and their communities. The cultural and social conditions that shape Scottish childhood have yet to successfully combat the high levels of social disadvantage experienced by too many young children and their families. Part of children's health and wellbeing derives from being actively engaged in experiences that promote a sense of self worth.

An extensive review was carried out to position the Starcatchers Project in terms of the available literature and to define, develop and shape an informing theoretical framework for the research. The research team has been deeply engaged in discussions helped and stimulated by the range of topics covered in meetings with the artists, the artists' blogs, parental and educator questionnaires and a rich vein of observations, photographs, video and field notes. The job of each researcher was threefold – to observe, learn and understand the development of their artists' work, to discuss work they had just seen and to meet and engage as a community of enquiry with the group of artists and to help make the tacit knowledge of the artists-in-residence practice more widely visible. Part of this was to consider the extent to which researchers used the artists' own tools as research tools to gather supporting data. Atmosphere, aesthetic, process, audience engagement, children's involvement, the environments and the props created and the properties or affordances that emerge (Vygotsky, 1989)

became both the artists' tools and opportunities for the researchers.

Gattenhof and Raddan (2009) highlight a need to develop the tools of artistic practice as means of researching this field, rather than conventional qualitative research approaches. Whilst the Starcatchers research approaches did make use of observation, and took advantage of the Starcatchers Project film archive, the research process was informed directly from the artists own processes, the children's activities and the performances themselves.

Positioning theory (Barnes, 2004; Boxer, 2001; Davies and Harré, 1990) allowed us to consider how people are placed by time, circumstance and the attitude of others; Lave and Wenger's communities of practice (1998), the ethnography of Corsaro (2000) and Rogoff's (1990, 2003a, 2003b) socio-cultural interpretations combine with the notion of agency and voice for the child (James, 2007; Qvortrup, 1994).

PARTICIPANTS

The principal participants in the research were the four Artists in Residence at four venues: The Platform, The Byre, The Tramway and Carnegie Hall; the children, families and practitioners they worked with and wider communities in which they were based. The participants mainly came from the local area of each venue. A number of parents actively seeking new experiences for their children sought Starcatchers out through the website.

DATA GATHERING

Data were gathered through narrative observation by the research team and through analysis of photographs and video episodes recorded as part of the artists in

residence day-to-day practice.

Observation data was augmented by informal discussions following researcher attendance at artistic events.

The team employed three modes of observation –

- 1) open narrative observation guided by the engagement signals;
- 2) tracking 2 children at a time for periods of 10 minutes;
- 3) scanning the whole group of children at 10 minute intervals

Through shared team analysis of the PEEP production recordings (Starcatchers Pilot Project, 2009) we expanded Young and Powers' (2008) original types of engagement ('Absorbed Engagement' and 'Interactive Engagement') to a set of 7 signals – 'attuned', 'absorbed', 'mirroring', 'responsive', 'interactive', 'instigative' and 'experimental'. As the researchers observed they also aimed to interpret the nature and quality of little children's engagement in the arts experiences on a five point scale of – apprehensive, tentative, attuned, secure and confident. The research team shared an understanding of each signal and kept this range in mind as they observed the children's participation in the project activities and identified the type of engagement. The signals formed the basis of coding narrative records, photographs and video episodes.

It was a requirement of the residency that each artist complete a regular reflective account, in the form of a blog, in which they recorded their thoughts, plans, descriptions of processes and reflections on the events in which they were involved. Additionally, data was gathered from the completed written responses to questions

posed by the university team and from notes from discussions and interviews with their individual research partners.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Pavis (2003) describes two types of analysis of theatre and performance: analysis as "reportage" and analysis as "reconstruction" (p.8). In reportage, the analysis seeks to provide a blow-by-blow account of the action on the stage, an "as you see it" response. While some of this level of detail was possible during the Starcatchers events, when, for example, researchers made observational notes linked to the children's engagement signals, it was never an intention to provide eye witness accounts of the performances themselves. The analysis of the artists' responses falls into Pavis' second category, analysis as reconstruction. This involved the collecting data connected with a performance, for example, statements from the artists, statements from the audience; photographs and videos. Through the analysis of these, opportunities arise for the development of objective knowledge and theoretical perspectives on the nature of theatre for young children. The artists' blogs, for example, allow the researchers "some understanding of the creator's intentions and their impact on the audience" (Pavis, 2003, p.10). The analysis of the data from the artists' blogs, notes and interviews, seeks to present some of the emerging themes and ideas and to give an authentic flavour of the artists' impressions of their creative processes before, during and after the theatre events.

One of the main drivers of the research was therefore to understand the nature of children's experience through observation of their responses and analysis of their

engagement in each of the situations Starcatchers offered, and from this evidence to consider what children gained from participating in the Starcatchers Project. We therefore focus on the range of their experiences through the notion of children's voices (James, 2007)

Exploring the children's narrative voice we have found that there are two main discourses – the discourse of process and the discourse of audience engagement. Both are visible in our raw data of observations, photographs, field notes and video footage. The discourse of children as audience is made visible through the development of engagement signals which were used both for direct observation and as a process of analysis.



KEY FINDINGS

- Children can engage intellectually, imaginatively, emotionally;
- Performing arts can shape culture, and children can *acquire cultural experiences* (and understanding) through the arts;
- The arts can involve pretence, imagination and creative imitation thus extending cultural understanding and engaging emotions;
- Performance/arts, and experimental approaches, can link to the children's own culture and chime with children's *responsiveness, initiative, ingenuity, imagination*;
- Children *instigate, experiment and collaborate* with artists in the development process;
- Works of art *have sustained existence, meaning and coherence*;
- Thought-through arts environments carry performative agency;
- Through experiences in the arts the children gain *an understanding of the rules of the genre* – in terms of the cultural and historical environment;
- Theatre experiences provide opportunities for empathetic imagination to develop;
- There is a challenge for theatre to provide creative experiences for young children;
- The *artistic integrity of the experiences* is just as important in theatre/performance for young children as it is for older audiences.

We may conclude that children are engaged, appropriately positioned and have agency at a number of levels within Starcatchers: an aspiration held by each of the artists. Data indicates that children are highly attuned, absorbed and responsive to the whole Starcatchers process: they mirror what they observe in the development and performance process, and instigate, experiment and collaborate with the artists in ways that are outside their day-to-day experience.

There are many glimpses of children's sense of wellbeing and self-worth and evidence of children's creativity, emotional expression, expressive language and a view of the 'power of looking; through what might call 'spectator as performer'.

Parents are clear about the benefits for their children. Involvement in Starcatchers gives parents leverage in their interactions with their own children. There is potential for parental involvement to move beyond the role of chaperone, audience or partner in paired experiences to parallel first hand experiences for adults: this raises the possibility of explicit co-creation with parents that was part of more than one of the residencies.

Important relationships developed between artists and venues and their level of commitment to young children in the longer term.

The contact between artists and children was essential to the artists planning for the performance pieces. There were degrees of participation for the children from active play participation through to shows where children were clearly positioned as audience. The creative processes meant that ideas were being

tested with the age group as part of the development of the work: their involvement in these processes are fundamental and make the work what it is. For the children involved in development, their role during a performance is qualitatively different than children who come to see any given show without having been involved in its creation. The engagement signals allow exploration of the extent to which this positioning is participatory and the extent to which any one piece primed children to spectate or to participate, as shown in the *Levels of audience participation* section at this end of this report.

If/when children join in on the set, either during the performance or at the end, or interact with the actors, they are then *invited* into the performance space by the artists. They are engaged in exploring, imitating and interacting but, ultimately, they are the audience and they are learning to behave *within the rules and conventions of theatre* from an audience perspective. Some of these **conventions** in terms of Starcatchers might be:

- An audience sits/stand and watches unless explicitly invited to do otherwise by the performer;
- An audience does not usually interact with the performers, in the way that they could in non-theatre activities, unless invited to do so;
- The audience and performers collude together in the understanding that the performers are *pretending* – e.g. it's not real tea/liquid; we are not in an attic / shop /cloud; the actor is not really a little girl / spaceman /toy. This links to *metaxis* ("the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds", Boal 1995, p.43) – in theatre we suspend our disbelief so that we can take

part in and gain enjoyment from the experience of pretending;

■ Theatre is *other*. The story/performance does not exist in “real” space, time and identity, but in the space, time and identity within the performance;

■ Performers use things to represent other things (e.g. a wrapped up shawl is a baby).

It is possible to discern, within the Starcatchers pieces, clear signals from the artists denoting the specific dramatic conventions involved and the related behavioural expectations of the audience.

The process of undertaking systematic action research was not always an easy journey for the artists. More accustomed to “doing”, to explicit action and implicit reflection, the project required them to make explicit their thoughts and reflections on, and the analyses of, their theatre practice. The support of the research team was important in helping them to find ways of describing, explaining and analysing the complex processes in which they were involved.

Additionally, within the four distinct settings, each artist had to find ways of dealing with the cultural perspectives and expectations of the audiences. They had to be open to change and to different perspectives, while maintaining their own artistic vision. In action research, posing questions helps to guide the researchers (here, the artists), focuses their thinking and enables them to: articulate particular areas of success; identify interesting features of their work and identify aspects for future development.

KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM ANALYSIS OF THE ARTISTS' BLOGS

The analysis of the Artists' Blogs led to the identification of a number of key themes in the Starcatchers' process, there were:

Creating atmosphere

Aesthetic Values

Artists' creative process

Artist-audience engagement

Children's (audience) involvement

Artists' evaluations of own process

Artists' obligations

Creating atmosphere

The physical look, and also the mood and tone, of performance pieces was central in the artists' work. There was clear value placed on creating a holistic experience, trying to engage not only the physical senses of the young audiences but also to cater for their emotional and intellectual responses.

Aesthetic Values – Integrity and Quality

The artists all expressed a belief that the artistic integrity and artistic quality of the experience of theatre and performance created for the young children were extremely important. There was extensive evidence in the blogs, interviews and discussions of the artists' concern for and attention to providing high quality, well produced work based on exacting aesthetic values. This focus was not on educational values, though these might be considered to be implicit, but about the about experiences in the arts for these young children.

Starcatchers artists as 'creators'

From the beginning, each artist had a clear 'artistic vision' of what they hoped to achieve. In response to a question about

how they designed their work, the artists were very clear that the process that they were involved in was 'creating' rather than 'designing'. This was an important distinction for the artists who regarded designing to be only part of a much more complex, thoughtful and creative process: artists employed designers to help to realise their artistic vision. But, they explained, they had employed the designers to make a contribution to the production, alongside, for example, musicians, actors and stage managers. However, the original and continuing creative concept (and therefore creative responsibility) lay with the Starcatchers artist.

Engaging the children (and their adults) in the performance

It was very important to all of the artists that the final theatre pieces were enjoyable and engaging for their young audiences. However, it was also important that the adults who accompanied the children were engaged by the performance so that they shared in the experience rather than being peripheral to it.

Involving children (and their adults) in the process of developing a performance

An important aspect of the Starcatchers process was that the artists worked with members of the community, children, parents and carers, in order to create theatre events that were tailored to their interests and fitted with their developmental stages. The artists often described how, during the development of their theatre pieces, they were involved in listening to and interacting with the potential audience, and were influenced by them.

Matching theatre experience and audience

One of the vital elements of the Starcatchers work for and with very young children, and

their parents and carers, is the matching of theatre experience to the requirements of the audience. There is a clear sense that part of the success of the projects has been that the theatre experiences were not just “done to” the audience: were not presented as the finished piece. Rather, the creating always involved collaboration, with the prospective audience and/or with other professionals. This consultation process was designed to produce well-received, audience-appropriate, high quality theatre experiences.

Artistic satisfaction

A final aspect emerging from the data was the evident satisfaction and pleasure that all of the artists gained from their work on the projects. There was an enthusiasm for, and growing understanding of, the Starcatchers vision and the artists, as they evaluated their work, demonstrated a real sense of achievement and pride in the work that they had undertaken.

The Starcatchers project was clearly very successful from the perspective of enabling talented artists to develop their own understanding of the value of theatre for very young children. The documentation of this understanding, both in our reports and in the developing website, is part of the Starcatchers legacy.

Artists obligations

It was evident that there was a duality in the way that the artists viewed their roles and responsibilities within the Starcatchers process: they had an obligation to the project, and the art-form in which they were working, to create works of high quality with excellent production values; and they had an obligation to their young audiences to provide them with appropriate, engaging and “special” experiences.



CONCLUSIONS

The Starcatchers project aims to promote collaborative engagement between professional artists, children, parents, early educators and researchers to create very different experiences for the youngest children that are other than theatre or conventional performance: though this may lead what they are calling a 'show', the process of development of each experience is central to each artist's work.

The positioning of very young children as a special audience and the subsequent reference to their powerful minds provides a paradox. Of course very young children are special, but by creating this difference there is a risk we patronise and position the smallest children as lacking competence or capacity to engage with a variety of performance forms. Care should be taken not to highlight only the differences between theatre for young children and theatre for adults. Theatre for young children should focus instead on its own artistic form and aesthetic merits, and on the legitimacy of these as theatre experiences. It therefore becomes crucial that we not only research the theatre experiences of the youngest children, but that we engage with its development and attempt to theorise what is happening as babies, parents, carers and very young children are brought together with artists and players in new worlds of experience.

The six impact categories of captivation, intellectual stimulation, emotional resonance, spiritual value, aesthetic growth and social bonding provided by Brown and Novak (2007) have a good deal of resonance with the Starcatchers research project, and fit with the stated

aspirations of both Imagineate and Starcatchers.

We propose that these six indices might provide a useful additional lens for considering the impact on the parents and carers and the very young audiences of the Starcatchers theatre performances. We recommend that future research focuses on the most vulnerable families and the professionals who work with them, to explore further the impacts already seen, in order to gauge the extent to which participation can indeed make a difference to lived lives.

For the four artists in residence theatre for young children involves atmosphere, aesthetic, artistic processes, artist-audience engagement, audience involvement and artistic growth. The artistic integrity and the artists' learning journeys gave children joyful and challenging experiences, where they could discover, look, listen and touch, be excited or relaxed and participate through their own engagement.

We have explored where the study sits within performing arts theory and early childhood research and have considered 'process' and 'product' approaches to the development and creation of performances for very young children. We have drawn on and helped make visible the perceptions the artists hold of their creative processes, the parents and carers' perceptions of the performances, the contribution of children as well as the impact upon them through engagement with Starcatchers.

Our data suggests that the involvement of very young children and their families in the Starcatchers Project provides experiences primed to enhance children's learning and

development and has the potential to create difference through innovative pedagogical approaches, in partnership with artists, arts venues, education and child-care settings and families.

The two year Starcatchers Project with its year long artist residences has firmly established the role Starcatchers plays as a leader in the field of arts related experiences and performance for very young children, their families and the professionals who work with them in Scotland and beyond.



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STARCATCHERS TIMELINE

The main project activities are shown here. In addition each piece was developed, presented on a number of occasions.

June 2009	▼ Project Start
August 2009	▼ Artists recruited
October 2009	▼ Babaró International Arts Festival for Children – Galway Natural Born Artists Conference at Babaró Festival, Galway Creative Curriculum Conference for the University of Strathclyde
November 2009	▼ <i>The Elf Experiment</i> (Platform) <i>Oops a Daisy</i> and <i>Shake N Bake</i> tour nurseries in Fife (On at Fife) <i>Sparkalator</i> (Tramway)
December 2009	▼ Newly appointed artists present their initial project aims <i>The Elf Experiment</i> , (Platform)
January 2010	▼ <i>Sprog Rock</i> (Tramway) <i>The Cloud Factory</i> (Platform)
February 2010	▼ <i>Round in Circles</i> (The Byre) work in progress sharing
March 2010	▼ Visioni di Futuro, Visioni di Teatro Festival – Bologna
April 2010	▼ Premiere Rencontres, Festival and Symposium – Val d'Oise, Paris 2Turven Hoog Festival – Almere, The Netherlands Scottish Arts Council Arts and Health Conference,
May 2010	▼ L'art et les petites – Theatre de La Guimbarde, Charleroi, Belgium
June 2010	▼ World Organisation for Early Childhood Education, Gothenburg
July 2010	▼ <i>Will you be my Guinea Pig?</i> (Tramway)
August 2010	▼ First Light public performances (Platform) <i>Sproglit</i> (Tramway)
September 2010	▼ Scottish Learning Festival
October 2010	▼ Early Childhood Australia Conference – Adelaide,
November 2010	▼ <i>The Elf Experiment</i> (Platform) <i>Oops a Daisy & Shake N Bake</i> tour nurseries in Fife (On at Fife) <i>Sparkalator</i> (Tramway)
January 2011	▼ <i>Ice Pole</i> public performances (Tramway) <i>Spacedust</i> (The Byre)
February 2011	▼ <i>This Sucks</i> (Platform and Tramway)
March 2011	▼ Starcatchers International Symposium Visioni di Futuro, Visioni di Teatro Festival – Bologna Learning Teaching Scotland Further Education College Conference
April 2011	▼ Little Big Bang Symposium, Take Art, Somerset International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network Conference at the ASSITEJ Congress, Malmo, May 2011
May 2011	▼ Bank of Scotland Imagine Festival
June 2011	▼ Project End
December 2011	▼ Starcatchers Network Event – the Research, the Legacy and the Future with Starcatchers Productions

▼ Continuous process of planning, development, collaboration and production of arts related performance experiences ▼

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THE STARCATCHERS ENGAGEMENT SIGNALS

Seven signals of children's engagement were developed to inform the observation of children's engagement and participation in Starcatchers

ENGAGEMENT SIGNALS

SIGNALS	DESCRIPTOR
ATTUNED	Watching, tracking and cued in to what is going on
ABSORBED	Intense attention for a period and ignores any distraction
MIRRORING	Watching and reciprocating through approximately repeating or copying
RESPONSIVE	Positive body language, social referencing, following verbal and non-verbal narrative and smiling/reaching/nodding
INTERACTIVE	Physically responding and doing, in 2 way exchange with another
INSTIGATIVE	Provokes action in others through own responsive action or vocalisation
EXPERIMENTAL	Taking individual action, with materials, props, instruments

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LEVELS OF AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

The use of engagement signals generated data showing the extent of interaction and co-production in each performance piece.

HIGH LEVEL OF INTERACTION AND CO-PRODUCTION

HIGHLY PARTICIPATIVE	IN AND OUT OF PARTICIPATIVE ROLE	CHILD SPECIFICALLY AS AUDIENCE
<i>The Playroom</i>		
<i>Space Dust</i>		
<i>Elf Experiment</i>		
<i>Multi Coloured Blocks from Space</i>		
<i>Sprog Rock</i>		
<i>This Sucks ThisWorkshop Sucks</i>		
<i>Cloud Factory</i>		
<i>Sparkalator</i>		
<i>Baby Chill</i>		
<i>Will you be my guinea pig?</i>		
	<i>The Incredible Swimming Choir</i>	
	<i>Ice Pole</i>	
	<i>Round in Circles</i>	
		<i>The Attic</i>
		<i>Shake n Bake</i>
		<i>Oops a Daisy</i>
		<i>Luvhart</i>
		<i>First Light</i>

INVITED PARTICIPATION
AT END OF SHOW

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