

FOR THE BEST

Evaluation





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A collaboration with the Unicorn Theatre, conceived by Mark Storor, produced by Anna Ledgard in association with Artsadmin

Report written by Susanna Steele



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1 CONTEXT

Background

For the Best was a participatory arts project developed over nine months culminating in a public performance from 2nd-28th June 2009 at the Unicorn Theatre, London. The performance was an exploration of a family experience of living with renal disease inspired by and created with 9 children in the Dialysis Unit of Evelina Hospital School and then developed with their peers in Charles Dickens Primary School (Southwark) and Worple Primary School (Hounslow) and a team of professional artists and performers.

Project Mission

For the Best sought to combine participatory arts practice with public performance of the highest quality.

Project Aims

- To evolve a unique and robust theatrical language for the presentation of sensitive issues to public audiences through collaboration with non-professional participants
- To create a site-specific participatory performance for adults and children which had at its heart the authentic voice of the child
- For participants to gain new insights into their own and others experiences; and to enhance skills, self-esteem and confidence through a creative and expressive arts process
- To develop understanding and learning about the process and challenges of arts education collaborations across bio-medical science, arts and education sectors
- To raise understanding of issues relating to renal disease and organ donation
- To present an innovative and original piece of theatre which will experiment with the ways in which audiences interact with performance and investigate the potential of the spaces within a theatre building as sites for performance
- To provide a high profile platform for debate and dialogue about participatory arts and applied theatre processes in relation to arts and science learning.
- For the wider public to engage with a unique, original and innovative theatrical experience

Partners

Artistic Director: Mark Storor
Producer: Anna Ledgard
ArtsAdmin: Gill Lloyd, Manick Govinda, Liz Holmes
Unicorn Theatre: Catherine Greenwood, Susanna Steele, Adam Caree
Evelina Hospital School: Manuela Beste, Mary Paddon, Alison Edgar
Evelina Children's Hospital: Laura Anderson, Senior Sister in charge of Dialysis Unit and nursing staff, clinical psychologist and consultant at Dialysis Unit
Worple Primary School (Hounslow): Maggie Newbury, Daniela Podsiadly, Graham Underwood, Michelle Nicholas
Charles Dickens Primary School (Southwark) Teddy Crane, Teresa de Quincey, Hannah Perkins
Artists & Performers: Jules Maxwell, Sofie Layton, Cathy Wren, Erika Poole, Andrew Whittuck, Andy Manley, Gary Bates, Keli Brown, Michael Lyle, Kate Hart, Babis Alexiadis
Schools Performers
Coordinator: Aylwyn Walsh

2 FINANCE

Income

Funding Partners:

Wellcome Trust	111,680
John Hedley Foundation/Unicorn Donors	27,000
Unicorn Theatre	39,000
Schools	950

Total	178,630
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Expenditure

Fees (producer/director/artists/ /evaluation/cover)	100,028
Production Costs	43,900
Publicity/marketing/design/ print/documentation	8,000
Symposium/talks	2,000
Transport	4,600
Administration/Overheads	6,600
Accommodation	2,502
Unicorn Theatre Staff costs	11,000

Total	178,630
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3 OVERVIEW

Establishing Partnerships

For the Best, conceived by Mark Storor and produced by Anna Ledgard, was made in partnership with a hospital, a hospital school, 2 primary schools, a theatre, artists and performers. Dialogue took place with all organisations to identify their priorities and to agree shared objectives and a collaborative framework. Having been inspired by the boldness and bravery of the young people who took part in BoyChild and Visiting Time (2004/2007 Storor/Ledgard collaborations with Dorset County Hospital) Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard wanted to work towards making a piece of theatre inspired by children's capacities to face difficult circumstances. Dialogue began with Evelina Hospital School in October 2008 which identified the Dialysis Unit and a linked primary school, Worple Primary School, as partners. The partnership with the Unicorn Theatre was confirmed in April 2008 and Charles Dickens Primary School joined the collaboration in December 2008.

Organisational Objectives

Organisational and learning objectives were defined during the development of the bid and can be summarised as follows:

The Evelina Hospital School wanted to provide a collective experience for children on dialysis who are often isolated by their individual medical interventions. They also wanted to develop a connection between pupils in the dialysis unit and their mainstream schools and to create a permanent outcome within the hospital school.

The Unicorn Theatre is dedicated to making theatre for young people of all ages and audiences include school groups, families and peer professionals. Involvement in For the Best offered the opportunity to become involved in a model of participation which allowed space and flexibility for young people to give shape to their experience through theatre making and to be co-creators of the work. The theatre also wanted to explore the ways in which audiences of all ages interact with performance and to realise the potential of the theatre as a site for performance outside dedicated theatre spaces.

Worple Primary School sought to develop a model of inclusion by using the creative process to develop a relationship between a pupil on dialysis and his class.

Charles Dickens Primary School sought to develop literacy and empathy skills whilst building on their relationship with the Unicorn Theatre.

The Wellcome Trust supported the making of innovative theatre and performance which enhance public understanding and engagement with bio-medical science.

Project Activity

From September 2008 Mark Storor worked as artist in residence on the Dialysis Unit with the children, hearing their stories, enabling them to create poems and to make images and entering into a reciprocal creative process with them. A team of artists worked to support the work in the school, bringing animation, sound recording and making skills to give form to the children's ideas.

Along with one of the children from the Unit Mark also devised an imagined journey drawn from images and writing the child had created that were metaphorical representations of his experience of his condition. This journey, named Out of Bounds, included a maze that had to be travelled through without crossing the boundaries, a meeting with a tiger whose fierceness had to be subdued and an impossible jigsaw that had to be completed blindfolded.

Responding to letters sent from this child, children at Worple School and at Charles Dickens School had to travel on the Out of Bounds journey and rise to the challenge of facing difficulties and hardships in collaboration with each other in order to succeed.

A team of 6 performers took part in a 6 week devising and rehearsal process in May 2009 which resulted in the creation of an 80minute piece of theatre for public audiences. The stories of the children in the dialysis unit were the source material for the devising process and, under the guidance of Mark Storor, artists and performers kept to the essence of these stories, going back to the source material all the time, whilst bringing their own experience to it, and making something new and fresh.

The performance of For the Best took place in the Clore studio, corridors and backstage areas of the Unicorn Theatre. It was attended by mixed audiences of adults and children – a total of 2,000. The show received excellent reviews, including a 5 star review in The Guardian, and was pick of the week in Time Out. The performance was accompanied by other events: a post-show talk organised in collaboration with London Arts in Health Forum (attended by 40 delegates); a masterclass for young performers (attended by 15); and a Symposium at City Hall (attended by 90 delegates).



4 EVALUATION AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The Evaluation will focus on

- The challenges and benefits involved in participating in For the Best for children and staff at the Evelina Hospital School.
- The nature of the collaboration between the children and parents in the renal unit and lead artist Mark Storor.
- Out of Bounds at Worple and Charles Dickens Primary Schools
- The challenges and benefits experienced by the partners involved in creating For the Best
- The transformation of an arts education participatory process into a site specific theatre piece for a public audience.
- The impact of the site specific performance on public audiences
- The responses of the bio-medical, arts and education communities

Data Collection

Data was collected in three phases. In the first phase evidence was gathered on what each partner was drawn to at the beginning and how the project furthered their priorities in their context. Consideration was given to the quality of relationships formed, the planning and structuring of the work, and the artistic and educational methods and their suitability to the contexts.

Phase Two of the evaluation gathered evidence on the artist's residency in the Dialysis School and the transformation of the work generated by the children in this residency into a piece of theatre for public audiences. This included examination of the part played by teachers and children in Worple and Charles Dickens Primary Schools and the impact of the project on curriculum and learning as well as awareness of issues relating to renal health.

The final phase of the evaluation involved the examination of a range of responses to the performance and the associated materials, debates, masterclasses and talks which accompanied it.

Sources of Evidence

- Interviews with key partners
- Documents: minutes/correspondence/applications/contracts/agreements
- Material generated during workshops
- Questionnaires gathering quantitative and qualitative data
- Previews, reviews and comment in the press
- Observations
- Photographs
- Reflective journals
- Semi-structured interviews
- Notes from review meetings
- Recordings of Symposium/documentation

5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- The ethical complexity and sensitivity of the project was recognised by Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard from the outset. Consequently, a long lead in time was considered necessary and this was viewed by educational and medical staff as an essential element in the success of the project at Evelina Hospital School. Whilst working in the Dialysis Unit Mark Storor gained the trust and support of both the educational and medical staff at the hospital whose concerns about the work interfering with the running of the Dialysis Unit proved unfounded. Storor worked with each child individually but a mutual interest in each other's work developed, creating a new sense of cohesion amongst the children.
- Many of the highly experienced artistic team that worked alongside Storor on For the Best had worked with him on previous occasions and understood the level of expertise and sensitivity that the project would entail. Storor was also able to create a similarly sensitive commitment to the material and to the process of devising from the team of performers who created For the Best. All acknowledged the valuable professional learning that had been gained through deep immersion in making work which genuinely responded to participants' experiences and ideas.
- As emphasised in the proposal, significant links were made between Evelina Hospital School and Worple Primary School. At Evelina the project provided the first opportunity

the Headteacher had encountered where work at the hospital school reached out to the mainstream school where one of the children in the Dialysis Unit was on register. For Worple School participation in the Out of Bounds project and the subsequent involvement in For the Best enabled them to develop their commitment to inclusive education. In the Out of Bounds project at both Worple and Charles Dickens Primary Schools, Anna Ledgard used her experience as an educator to ensure that the work linked to the mainstream curriculum. Linking creative arts process to current curriculum concerns contributed significantly to the confidence in the work shown by teachers at each school.

- An inclusive approach which began with establishing shared objectives with partners and included responsive artistic practice which ensured that the 'voice' of the child was the central holding frame for For the Best
- There were good working relationships established with all partners involved in the project, at all stages and in all settings. When the work began at the Unicorn Theatre the relationship with the production team became the focus and this proved to be both demanding and creative. However, the Education team at the Unicorn became overstretched due to competing pressure and a lack of sufficiently clear communication. This is a key area of learning for future projects for both the Unicorn Education team and Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard. Regular meetings with all parties where responsibilities and commitments are clarified would enable clearer communication and provide a forum for resolving difficulties and dealing with unforeseen circumstances. The Education team were, however, included in all the work in schools and this, as outlined in the proposal, supported the Education team's approach to the Teachers Resources for For the Best.
- For the Best at the Unicorn Theatre made use of spaces in the building to create a piece of immersive theatre, described by Lyn Gardner in her Guardian review (14/9/09) as *an extraordinary, fierce and moving show which gains richness, texture and moving intimacy from the stories of the children involved*. The Theatre Management Association recognised For the Best as an innovative and challenging piece of theatre and awarded the show the TMA 2009 award for the Best Show for Children and Young People.

- A Symposium on For the Best, organised by Anna Ledgard and Artsadmin, was held at City Hall. This was attended by an interested audience of biomedical, education and arts professionals. Although this may not have enabled a deep engagement with any one area, it did provide an opportunity for wide ranging discussion amongst professionals who do not often get such opportunities. Many of the issues raised at this debate will benefit from further exploration.
- For the Best succeeded in raising awareness and understanding of renal illness through presenting the metaphysical, rather than the physical aspects of the condition. Storor's approach enabled participants to draw on their narrative knowledge, and bio-medical science was presented in relation to these narratives. The depth of engagement with science of the audiences tended to depend on the extent of preparation and follow-up which took place in the classroom. Teachers acknowledged that alongside viewing the performance, the Education Resource was an extremely valuable stimulus to further exploration of bio-medical and ethical issues.
- For the Best has been widely documented throughout all phases which provides both a record of the project and evidence for evaluation and research purposes. This will enable further reflection on the processes and outcomes of the work which will be of interest to professionals in biomedicine, the arts and education.



6 MARK STOROR'S OPENING WORKSHOP

Mark Storor, the artist at the centre of *For the Best*, has rich and varied experience as both a visual artist and a theatre maker. *For the Best* was a complex and demanding project that required Mark Storor to work in several different settings, each of which required a different response from him as an artist and theatre maker, drawing on his experience across different art forms. The opening workshop in every setting, however, had the same approach which provided a thoughtfully constructed framework for participants to explore perceptions of themselves. This section gives a glimpse into Storor's creative process that will give some insight into the way the project unfolded in each context.

Each workshop began with the participants making a drawing of their physical self whilst blindfolded. Translating the sensate experience of the body into a visual image without seeing what is being created provided a safety for those involved by removing the hesitancy that can come with expectations of making a recognisable representation. It also signalled a shift from a focus on the external world to the unique inner landscape of each participant that would deepen as the workshop progressed.

The next activity encouraged a shift in language use from discursive to expressive mode. Storor asked participants to identify themselves with objects, landscapes; creatures etc. As in:

If you were an animal what would you be?

The responses were personal and private and at no time were any of the participants asked to explain their choices. This shift to expressing self perception through metaphor then provided the source of the visual images in the next stage of the workshop.

Each of the participants then drew round a partner to provide them with a life sized outline of themselves. This outline was then filled with the images created earlier using whatever materials participants chose from the rich array of resources Mark Storor provided.

It is worth noting the emphasis Storor places on the range of materials he makes available for these workshops and the care he takes in ensuring he has what might be needed. In her forthcoming article on Mark Storor's work Anna Ledgard comments:

Storor has a shopping trolley with him at all times full of enticing materials; careful replenishing between sessions means that he is always equipped with the necessary materials for children to follow through their idea in visual form, for example, a child mentions a jigsaw in his writing, the next time Storor meets him he will have jigsaw pieces with him to work with.

Although there is no guarantee that participants will engage in these activities beyond the playful game of it, nonetheless, Storor has structured the workshop in ways that provide the opportunity for more significant involvement. The forms that Storor introduced to the groups - the structured list of personal metaphors and the translation of these into images contained within an outline of the body - have an essential capacity for reflexivity in that they offer an invitation to pay attention to experience and the act of expressing abstract concepts, thoughts and feelings as visual images can become a process of discovery. Eisner (2002) succinctly expresses this as *the worker not only speaks to the work; the work speaks to the worker*.

In his work Storor trusts this capacity of visual metaphor to express ideas, thoughts and feelings that may not be expressed with the same imaginative force in more literal forms of communication. It is this that permeates all aspects of the project from the work with children in the dialysis unit to the final performance of For the Best.

7 EVELINA HOSPITAL SCHOOL

"Your project has been one of the most integrated into our way of working."

Headteacher Evelina Hospital School

Integrating the project into the work of the School

In their proposal to the Wellcome Trust artist Mark Storor and producer Anna Ledgard recognise the sensitivity and ethical complexity of the project. They also acknowledge that, if the work at Evelina Hospital School was to gain the trust and cooperation of all those who would be involved, building *sound working relationships with the medical and educational professionals* was essential. For this to occur *long lead-in times* would play an important role in developing *strong partnerships based on trust*. (Proposal to The Wellcome Trust). Concern for creating an approach to participatory arts practice that is both sensitive and ethical was reflected in the ways in which the plan for the project was discussed with the education, medical and psycho-social teams at Evelina Hospital, including before the proposal was submitted for consideration by the Wellcome Trust. As part of the initial discussions Mark Storor, Anna Ledgard and staff at Evelina Hospital School addressed the opportunities, concerns and challenges the project might encounter in working within the constraints of the Dialysis Unit.

A significant aspect of this inclusive approach to project design was the emphasis given in the final proposal to the time frame for the work. Mark Storor's residency at the

hospital school took place for two days a week between September and December 2008 and for a further one day a week between January and April 2009. This has been raised by Manuela Beste, Headteacher at Evelina Hospital School as an essential element of the project and key to the success of the work. In her view, sufficient time was needed to enable the work to build up slowly and appropriately in the Dialysis Unit and, most importantly, for Storor to be able to respond to the challenge of working around the needs of the ward. Manuela Beste points out that the long time frame which allowed Mark *to just sit and watch and look and learn and not necessarily come straight away in and do* is in marked contrast with other projects where artists have come in begun work with the children straight away and *haven't got the time to sit and watch, you know, that's not what they have got their funding for*. Both education and medical staff viewed the time taken to integrate into the work of the Unit as one of the strengths of the project as it gave them the confidence to trust that Storor's approach was sensitive to the needs of all the staff as well as the children.

This carefully considered time frame also contributed to dispelling the initial apprehension expressed by members of the medical staff who were concerned that Mark Storor's residency would interfere with the essential running of the Dialysis Unit. As Alison Edgar points out:

any kind of workshop has to understand that there are restrictions on space and noise and that what is happening to the children medically has to take priority.

Although Deputy Headteacher Mary Paddon appreciated *that the children would find it a valuable experience and develop some skills and enjoy the opportunity of working with an artist*, she also expressed concern at the outset about how the unexpected interruptions that are a part of daily life in the Dialysis Unit would be dealt with:

I wondered more about the practicalities – how would it happen practically on the ward given the fact that it can be very busy and things can go wrong with machines – how would that hinder the whole experience?

Alison Edgar (Senior Teaching Assistant) also pointed out *that explaining the unit doesn't give you an understanding of how the dynamics work and to understand how difficult it is at times*. Her comment points again to the need for

time to become attuned to both the processes of the Dialysis Unit and the practical difficulties of working in a space *where it is very difficult to do practical things* and where, *when you are trying to get children to their machines the last thing you need is an artist with a big piece of paper leaning on it.*

At the first review meeting of the project Storor, too, recognised the artistic challenge that working on the Dialysis Unit presented:

For me, I am still learning how to be. I'm usually very physical, so how do you get abundance within restraints?

By the time Storor began working with the children in the Dialysis Unit, however, he was viewed by the teaching staff as *just another teacher who is in there for a term and maybe a term and a half – another adult that we can rely on and trust.*

In the hospital setting, where invasive procedures and the demands of treatment leave little room for independent choices, a sense of control over events was an important consideration. This had been recognised in the proposal by Storor and Ledgerd and during the residency the staff noted how Storor *gave the children control so that they feel they can opt out and in. They are controlling the pace not you.* The relationship that Storor developed with the participants was also perceived by the Headteacher as being responsive to what the children offered:

I thought at first that there was going to be his own agenda but it became very clear that he really didn't have an agenda of his own that needed to be filled except that he wanted to help mediate whatever the child had. But he was also flexible about taking what the child needed or gave and making it and developing that, whatever it was.

There were also concerns about infection control during the residency and it was important, as the Headteacher pointed out, to make sure that *everyone was really au fait with hand hygiene, that Mark was aware of what materials could be used and the cross infection that could occur.* A less sensitive approach than that observed by Storor could have jeopardised the work of the Unit and the health of the participants

One of the stated aims of For the Best was to *enhance*

learning about the processes and challenges of arts and science collaborations in a setting that presented particularly challenging circumstances. A year before the Dialysis Unit at Evelina Hospital became involved in the project it had been acknowledged that the Unit had been missing out on external visitors. Consequently several arts projects had been set up as part of the work of the school including work with the National Gallery and the London Symphony Orchestra, both of whom have continued with visits. For the Headteacher, however, For the Best is the only project so far that has worked directly with the children's experience of their condition and with the bio-medical science that entails. In her view the central challenge of collaborating with artists in the Dialysis Unit is the difficulty of working around the needs of the ward. These needs have to be understood and accepted as part of the conditions of the project because *it's the organisational challenges that cause the headaches especially if the artists have things that they need or want to do that aren't possible*. In her opinion, Storor managed to embed the work into the routines of the Unit in a way that she had not previously experienced. The ways in which For the Best was negotiated, the sensitivity shown to the needs of both the children and the medical staff and the embedded quality of the project will inform the ways in which future projects are established within the hospital school.

The children who attend the Dialysis Unit at Evelina Hospital come with their own specific curriculum needs determined by the mainstream school they attend. However, often the degree of renal failure the children are experiencing means they are not well enough to attend mainstream schools. During the time of the project there were children working at primary and secondary level as well as a child with Special Educational Needs.

The arts are already a part of the work at the hospital school and, in the Headteacher's view there are three different approaches. Work in the arts can be seen as creative endeavour linked to the statutory curriculum that leads eventually to some kind of accreditation or as an enriching experience where the participants *can come at something new through art where you might have been resistant to learning it in a more traditional way*. But children can also participate in the arts within the particular context of being in a dialysis unit. She suggests that this view of the arts as a way of reflecting on experience is one that is not often part of the children's education in the Unit as there are

other more pressing concerns, such as dealing with the anxieties of going back into school and being behind with academic work. It is this last approach, where the arts are seen as a way of mediating the children's experience of their condition, that the Headteacher considers the most significant aspect of Storor's work in the Dialysis Unit because *the education work in the Unit is not only about academic learning but also about building resilience.*

All members of the teaching staff who were involved with the project made time for the activities and enabled the children to participate as fully as possible in the work. One of the teachers, for example, took on the role of mediating between Mark and the ward staff in order to ensure that everything was coordinated and timetabling who would work and when. Being involved in the project was seen as an opportunity for the children to have expressive freedom and a control over content which was *in contrast to a curriculum where so much is prescriptive.*

"They feel in a safe place. It's a place of positive feedback."

Teacher Evelina Hospital School

Workshops with children

A defining aspect of Mark Storor's work as an artist is his capacity to be patient with the participatory process and to build relationships slowly in order to create work that, as Guardian theatre critic Lyn Gardner has described a previous project, *springs genuinely from the lived experiences of those taking part and grows patiently and organically.* (GuardianArtsblog 3.50pm June 11th 2007)

Building a relationship with the children and their parents on the Dialysis Unit; getting to know the medical and teaching staff; understanding how the ward functions were essential elements of the arts process for Storor. During the first review meeting for example, Storor, in reflecting on the initial stages of the work, stated that his concerns were *to find the right place within the framework of the school.* In response, a teacher at the school commented on Storor's flexibility and his ability to understand that *we have to be flexible and adaptable to what will work best.*

Even though Mark worked with individuals, the commonality of the approach and the sharing of work created a new sense of cohesion in the Unit which was noted by both the education and medical staff. It is recognised by the staff

that the complex organisation of the Unit, the limitations on space and the caution that has to be observed regarding cross-infection presents ongoing difficulties in creating a cohesive group amongst the children and they can become isolated. Storor worked with each child individually and, at the outset, one of the teachers had been doubtful that the children would be able to sustain their engagement with the work but as it progressed she observed that it was *quite the reverse*. During the project the staff observed children becoming interested in each other's work, sharing ideas and wanting to see what each other was doing and they became, as one teacher observed, *little mini audiences for each other*.

During the first review meeting, teachers reported the children wanting to share their work even when they were working individually - *They're reflecting back to each other. They feel in a safe place. It's a place of positive feedback*. A collective involvement and a sense of community was being created in the Unit through each individual's contribution. This sustained interest in the work, in the Headteacher's view, was because the children knew they were all part of the whole process over a period of time, with all of their work providing the generating material for the creation of the final performance. This new sense of being part of a group involved in a joint endeavour was seen by the education staff as an important outcome of the work.

Mark worked with each participant within the workshop framework and in each case the work was responsive to the individual needs of each child and drew on their experience of living with renal disease. In the proposal these workshops are described as focusing on the *theme of identity* but the Headteacher's way of expressing her understanding of project illuminates this further:

"The whole idea that we are talking about is to make the invisible visible in the way that your medical condition is invisible - it's inside you. How do you bring that out? How does that affect your life? How can you bring that out into the open so that you can try and share it the way you would say it? And change it from just being an experience of pain."

Head Teacher

Workshops with parents

When a child has renal failure it affects the whole family, and each member of a family responds in a different way. This understanding of the complexity of family responses was acknowledged in the original proposal for the project. Parents of the children regularly dialysing attend the hospital with their children, taking breaks from the ward and talking together in the café. Storors invited a group of mothers to work with him. This enabled them to understand more about what their children were doing when they were working with Storor on the ward and also gave them an

opportunity to explore and express their experiences of being the parents of ill children. For example, during one of the workshops conversation with three of the mothers revolved around how much time was spent waiting and worrying and always being tempted by muffins in the café. Storor arrived at the next workshop with bags of muffins and, together with three of the mothers, created a 'muffin-mother' puppet from the cakes. This image of mothers as both needing and providing sustenance was one that was taken up during the devising process and found a place in the final performance.

"Just thanks to Mark - you came and we did this art project and every patient did something. I hope people understand what we have created."

Child J

The Children's Responses

These brief accounts of three of the children's responses to working with Mark Storor gives an insight into their perceptions of the work and the contribution it made to their self esteem and confidence. It also reveals their insight into their own and others' experience.

**I am a rich green pepper, smooth, bright
I am a creative pepper, rich, green, smooth and bright
Belonging to a sisterhood of richly coloured, lushly
textured peppers:
red, orange, yellow, green**

**However, slice into my core, and deep
inside my core is dark purple.
My feelings, heartfelt emotion, lies in deep.
I peer into the deep darkness
and recognise a vein of purple jealousy stirring
I push it deeper
Amongst the other tubes
My purple heart core
Although limited make note
Restricted intake - drops**

**I am water
Limited water passes my lips but I am water.
Open, clear, crystal cold, a fountain of reflection
comes to those who gaze into me.
Water holds memory - mix water to substance and
It canchange things
The property like magic**

**I am hospital, my second home,
A home is not always where you might expect it,
I am attached, actually attached,
physically, emotionally, mentally, actually,
dialysis is part of me**

**I know everyone, my other family,
when you have something of myself is here
People who care for you
You are safe
Something of myself is here**

Child J, a 15 year old girl, wrote in her biography for the For the Best programme:

Working with Mark was really enjoyable and I learned a lot. I loved using the different coloured ribbon because it expressed my feelings. It helped me express how I felt on dialysis.

In her first meeting with Mark, Child J thought he was enthusiastic and that, although she didn't know what it would be about, she 'thought we would do something different'. As she is studying for her art GCSE the work also contributed to her academic development and, according to her mother, Child J has ambitions to be a designer or an architect in her future career. Her mother is, however, also aware that Child J might have to reconsider this due to her health and may have to opt for something that is less demanding.

Working with Mark gave Child J an opportunity to work with an artist and gave her experience of the persistence it takes to solve the problems that can arise in expressing an idea visually:

In my picture I had the dialysis machine as well and we were trying to make it as realistic as possible so we had a tube and we were trying to put red through it and that was hard. We tried all sorts of things - a needle, wool - everything and it wouldn't go through and it kept spilling out. Eventually Mark - no, me and Mark - we worked it out!

When asked directly what she thought she had learned during the project Child J had no difficulty in asserting that learning had taken place:

What have I learned? That's a hard question actually - there's a lot to think about and I learned all sorts of things. It was just the whole experience - it was a learning experience. When I was going through the whole project I was learning all along - I never thought I would think stuff like that.

Eisner (2002:27) suggests that work in the arts can be a transformational process, and that the images we make can be a way of "creating our lives by expanding our consciousness". For Child J to comment that *she never thought that I would think stuff like that* offers some evidence that the work has been transformational for her. It also indicates that the forms offered by Mark have given her a way of containing, and making public, thoughts and feelings about her renal condition that have only previously existed in 'the private precincts of her consciousness', as Child J writes in her poem *heartfelt emotion lies in deep*.

Child J understood the relationship between the work at the hospital and the final performance of For the Best at the Unicorn Theatre and that her work would become part of this. She was also aware of what she wanted other people to understand from the work:

"I'd like others to understand how we are on dialysis which uses up a lot of my time. And I would like them to know that we are always improving our own life"

Child K

When I go there and people watch it just from what I've done I want people to understand the fact that we are kids on dialysis. That's the main thing and it's part of life. I was saying it's part of my life when I put the machine in the picture – I want them to see what we go through and what we have to put up with as well.

I am a cabbage, full, wholesome, tight close, into myself, a whole person.

Compacted, my leaves like a new page open up a little at a time.

The cabbage is like the journey of life, its heart lies deep rooted within the layers.

I am Fire. I have great burning ambitions I always want to aim higher if you start a fire it gradually multiply it keeps catching on if you don't put it out. It is wild unlike the rhythms of the sea. I am like an internal fire that suddenly burst out, sometimes calms and sometime explosive.

I am Sky blue. Sky blue can give people a sense of peace. It offers opportunity, possibilities and hope. Gazing at sky blue, images appear. A wondering mind can travel from miles and miles and miles.

They say the black hole can suck you in, it represents death but I don't believe the world, life, everything will end easily. There is a point beyond, there is no black hole but there is a room and the room will never be empty. You may enter through one door and not immediately see that there is another one too. When you get used to the dark, you will have the eye to see everything far beyond your imagination.

I am Romance. Music fills my soul and I am drenched in song. Lyrics live in my memories. A song is like a poem, they are about culture, experience and emotion. I understand the lyrics I feel the music, I know the song, but I'm hanging by a thread of desperate longing, waiting for my turn but I haven't experience anything yet...just yet but when it comes my whole body will bust with fireworks shooting through the pores of my skin like a bomb inside my belly, love will explode and my fragile heart beats harder than ever in my life sinking deeper into the world of love. I live through the word the song the melody and harmonies and try to understand other people feelings maybe, just maybe, I could help others to understand too.

Once upon a time There was a young
princess Who often didn't feel well
For all her life she was often
sick The princess, whose name
was a secret, Lived in the tallest
tower of a glittering palace
With round windows and lilac
flag That flew in the wind

prince

on the

was

spot

handsome

galloped

unicorn

reared



Child K is a 16 year old boy who wrote for his biography:

I have been coming to dialysis for two years and I'm dialysed four times a week. I enjoyed working with Mark on the arts project. I produced a piece of writing by answering questions about myself.

For Child K, who has only been in England for two years, it was imperative that when he was the Unit he kept up with his academic work to ensure that he was meeting the demands of his GCSE studies. As the Headteacher points out the first thing is always to enable the children to keep up with their studies, to help deal with the anxieties of going back into school and to ensure that being dialysed does not interfere with academic ambition.

Child K's participation in the project was encouraged by the staff in the Unit because, as the Headteacher observed, *for wider development and for his personal enrichment he needed to go beyond academic study.* His involvement was also seen as contributing to his language development in English which for him is an additional language:

but creating and also using his linguistic skill for pleasure will strengthen his linguistic skills when he's doing his GCSE ... when he's doing it through his art he's practising it without thinking that he's practising it.

The way Storor was able to build a sound working relationship with both the education and medical staff has already been noted. This capacity to create confidence and trust was also commented on by Child K who agreed to be part of the project because of the way Storor introduced himself. In interview Child K notes:

To be honest, I had never heard of Mark's reputation but when I seen him – when I met him - I think he did brilliantly. I said yes to the project because he showed me the work he's done. If you meet a guy who's a stranger and he shows you the work he did then you can evaluate his work.

For children in a situation where there are few choices and little opportunity to opt out of events, creating a situation where there is a transparency about what is on offer and who is involved is of the utmost importance in creating trust between artist and participants. For Child K the credibility of Storor as an artist whose skills and experience were evident was an important factor in Child K choosing to

participate.

Throughout the project Child K was willing to take risks and to work in ways that were unfamiliar and saw himself as collaborating with Storor:

he has a very good imaginative mind and he has the techniques that – how do you say – collapse together - no, a word I can't remember - to get together my ideas and his ideas.

Child K found working to create a sketch of himself with his eyes closed particularly challenging especially in the kind of thinking it required:

we close our eyes and try to draw ourselves – go to where is our hands and where is our eyes and we drew and we drew and we had to think about - about using your imagination and analysing skills together.

But he has equally clear insight about what he gained from the work:

It has expanded the way how I think and I can present to Mark that I have got some emotional knowledge that I can share with him and he can share the art knowledge with me as well.

Child K was also able to articulate with great clarity what he wanted the wider public audience to discover about the lived reality of his situation:

Because we have that life I'd like others to understand how we are on dialysis which uses up a lot of my time. And I would like them to know that we are always improving our own life. We never give up.

A teacher at the hospital school commented on Child K's increased confidence as a writer since the project which offers some evidence that the writing that M created as part of the project, and its inclusion in the For the Best performance, has strengthened his perceptions of himself as a writer of poetry in particular. In conversation after the Symposium he confided that not only does he want to be a poet, he needs to write poetry. Since his participation in For the Best Child K has written several poems including one for a friend in the Unit to celebrate her birthday which he texted to her when she was confined in a separate room for treatment.

It is not the ambition to be a poet that seems to be most significant but his sense of needing to write poetry. One of the concerns that the Headteacher expressed about Child K at the outset of the project was his interest in qualifications. *Everything in school, she said, has to have a qualification.* In Child K's opinion *you don't do anything for the pleasure of doing it.* In the light of M's comment about emotional knowledge referred to earlier Child K seems to have discovered, or perhaps gained more confidence in knowing, that poetry offers a form within which to express thoughts, feelings and responses to life and a way of sharing these with others

Child L

*And what did surprise me
when I was helping him do his
pictures was his ideas about
what bits went in.*

Learning Support Assistant

Child L, who described himself as a *cheeky eight year old*, had to be dialysed six times a week and consequently was unable to attend school. He was however, still on the register in the Year 4 class at Worple Primary School even though he had never been to class. Manuela Beste, Headteacher at the hospital school, pointed out that this was an unusual situation because children who are too ill to attend over such a long period were usually no longer kept on register which means that there would be no connection maintained between the child and mainstream schooling. Worple Primary School, according to Beste, could have said *this child is never in school so we can't send you a teaching assistant as schools have said in the past.* But Worple Primary is a school committed to inclusive education and, against initial opposition from the Local Education Authority, the Deputy Head, Maggie Newbury, argued for an LSA to be assigned to L who would work with him in the Dialysis Unit on the same work as the class would be doing at school. Consequently, she came from the school everyday bringing work for Child L to do, if he was well enough. This was seen by both schools as a positive model and, according to Manuela Beste, one of the first times she had seen medical, social and education agencies, working together to support a child and his family.

From the start of the project Child L was very ill and was, as Manuela Beste describes it, *having a terrible time and needed to be brought out of himself* and into his self esteem and be made to feel good about himself. She was concerned that Child L *did not want to do anything that he thought was about school* or that he thought might be difficult and she is keenly aware of the transformations that took place in Child L through his participation in For the Best.

To begin with, she says, he didn't like his hands to get sticky, he didn't like to do cutting and sticking because he didn't like glue on his fingers, now look at the boy!

Mark Storor worked with Child L, as he did with all the children, at a pace that allowed the work to grow and deepen slowly, wanting him, as he stated in a review meeting, to enjoy this because it's absolutely about him. *Then we might see later how it might become something else - it might take three weeks.*

Through working with Storor new connections were created between Child L and his class. Although there had been a link established with the school through the teaching assistant there had been no direct communication between Child L and the other children in the class. In order to bridge this gap, and to involve the school in the work on For the Best, Mark Storor and Child L collaborated in devising a series of challenges that created a difficult journey based on the images and metaphors Child L had created in his writing. Unlike the curriculum based work that he worked on with the LSA, Child L approached creating the participatory workshop which became Out of Bounds with enthusiasm.

In the Dialysis Unit Child L wrote letters to the class instructing them on the challenges. These were taken by Mark to the school where the class attempted to meet the demands of the task set by an unknown 'game master'. In a discussion after all the challenges had been met and the identity of the game master revealed the children reflected on what they now knew about L that they hadn't before.

There is positive evidence to suggest that the experience of Out of Bounds, as the drama journey was called, transformed both the class's perception of Child L and Child L's perceptions of himself. Children considered that they now understood more about Child L's situation. They not only connected with him more as an individual but also had more empathy with his situation than had previously been the case and, in the view of one child, Out of Bounds had been a way of creating a friendship between them:

if you're in hospital you still have a brain and L wanted us to understand that he is going through so much and can't get home a lot.

The adventure of creating the game with Storor had engaged Child L in a way that the Headteacher had never seen before and created significant changes in a child who was reluctant to do anything related to school and lacked self esteem at the start

of the project. He now goes home, she commented, *thinking about it and he's thinking about what he's going to do with the kids – he's thinking about that translation into the school which is what we want to happen.*

Similes, metaphors and images, as Daniel Goleman (1996) points out, speak directly to the emotional mind and, as part of an arts process, they can create ways of communicating our responses to events. As with Child J, there is evidence to suggest that Child L's participation in the project has presented him with a form within which he could discover something about his feelings and responses to being on dialysis. Some insight into how this is reflected in Child L's work is revealed by Michelle Nicholas, Child L's Learning Support Assistant, whose self confessed scepticism at the outset of the project led her to ask him directly about his work. Child L had included a tiger image in his writing which he subsequently created as a collage and this prompted Nicholas to ask him where the idea had come from.

I did a lot of work with L about his answers and why his answers were his answers. You know basically a lot of the time children are not necessarily looking at the animal they are themselves as a person. Then when I asked him why are you a tiger? He said 'it's because I am angry with everyone and I want to roar at them and make them go away' that really did make sense. And what did surprise me when I was helping him do his pictures was his ideas about what bits went in.

Despite the extreme gravity of his condition Child L did manage to make a visit to the school to meet the class and, in the DVD produced by Maggie Newbury to celebrate the work of the project, he comments, putting his thumbs up and smiling, that *it was the best day of his life*. In conjunction with the hospital, Worple School also supported Child L's visit to the theatre to see *For the Best* when his class were performing which presented an opportunity for Child L to confirm his connection with his peers. There was reluctance on the part of the medical staff to let Child L leave the hospital and his mother appealed to the senior consultant for permission that was granted on the proviso that Child L was accompanied by three nurses who would monitor his condition. Their insistence that their son see *For the Best* despite the risks that might entail is confirmation of the value put on Child L's involvement in the project by his parents.



8 OUT OF BOUNDS

The Primary Schools

"I've learnt that it's good to try even if you do fail and that bringing your emotions to things is a good thing because if no one knows your emotion how are they going to know how to treat you."

Boy T Worple School

Worple Primary School, Hounslow
Charles Dickens Primary School, Southwark

The original proposal for For the Best included having primary school children participating alongside the professional performers. It was envisaged that the children would be pupils at either the mainstream school of one of the children who attended Evelina Hospital School or from a school identified by the Unicorn Theatre. However, to ensure that For the Best met the legal requirements regarding children's participation in live performance at the Unicorn Theatre it was necessary to involve two mainstream primary schools.

Worple Primary School is the school where Child L was on register in the Year 4 class but due to the intense programme of dialysis he required he had never attended class. The school places an emphasis on inclusion and viewed the project as a way of further developing this aspect of the school's ethos by both including L in the life of the school despite his inability to attend and developing their connection with Evelina Hospital School. This initiative was lead by Assistant Headteacher Maggie Newbury and Class Teacher Danielle Podsiadly, who both put time and energy into ensuring that there was clear communication between the schools and supported the children in attending the Unicorn when they were performing in For the Best. The Out of Bounds workshops took place at Worple School once a week for six weeks from January 16th until February 13th 2009.

Charles Dickens Primary School was selected by the Unicorn as it is a school in close proximity that had expressed an interest in developing stronger links with the theatre. Barkis Class, a class of Year 3 and 4 children, took part in the project with Class teacher Teddy Crane and Creative Arts Coordinator Hannah Perkins supporting the children throughout the Out of Bounds workshops and during their performances at the Unicorn. At Charles Dickens the workshops took place in the school once a week for six weeks from February 26th until April 2nd 2009.

Making links to educational priorities

From Mark Storer and Anna Ledgard's perspective it was important that the children who were to be part of the performance were also part of the participatory work leading up to the creation of For the Best. This participatory involvement took the form of a series of workshops called Out of Bounds which emerged out the residency at Evelina Hospital. These were created by Storer in collaboration with Child L, whose experience as a dialysis patient shaped the six three hour workshops.

The workshops were based on the idea of exploring and experiencing a difficult journey using drama as a metaphor for dealing with challenging situations. In each of the Out of Bounds workshops the challenge was presented to the class through a letter composed by Child L and Mark and signed from an anonymous 'friend' whose identity was not revealed until the final workshop. In each of the schools the framework of the workshops was the same but the responses and reflections of the participants were specific to the participants in each setting.

There is no doubt that being involved in the project enabled links to be made between mainstream schools and Evelina Hospital School, as set out in the proposal. It is also important to acknowledge the care taken by Anna Ledgard in ensuring that the work dovetailed with the particular curriculum priorities of both of the primary schools involved. Ledgard sees the planning meetings that took place prior to

the start of Out of Bounds as critical because they enable what she refers to as a translation process to take place. The meetings support the school in identifying their priorities and agree a schedule that will *work for us all by meeting differentiated learning needs without compromising the artistic content or approach*. Anna Ledgard's experience as an educator enabled her to negotiate with the staff at both of the schools involved to ensure that the workshops linked with their curriculum priorities as is evident in the outline plans created for each school.

At Worple School, Deputy Headteacher Maggie Newbury and her team have strong commitment to inclusion and viewed participation in the project as one of the ways in which the school could develop this aspect of their work. For Danielle Podsiadly, the class teacher at Worple, the work would link to the SEAL aspects of the curriculum; broaden the children's experience of working with artists in school and link to the term's theme in Literacy of dilemma stories.

At Charles Dickens Primary School a different emphasis was established. Anna Ledgard and the staff concerned, class teacher Teddy Crane and Creative Arts Coordinator Hannah Perkins, discussed the priorities for the term and, as Ledgard states, *it became clear that the workshops could also be a vehicle for them to achieve their literacy goals*. In her evaluation of the project Perkins emphasised the importance of this curriculum connection and commented on how it reassured the staff of the educational focus of the work. The workshops were viewed as being *well structured and presenting no risk to the school because week to week we knew what was going to be put across*

Responses to Out of Bounds

Whilst the Out of Bounds workshops did not set out to replicate in any way Child L's experience of being on dialysis, they did emerge from the images and metaphors Child L had used in his work to express his experience of having kidney disease. In Out of Bounds these were transformed into encounters within an imagined reality where the participants had to work together to meet the

challenges set – a maze that had to be safely journeyed through; a tiger whose ferocity had to be subdued and jigsaws of increasing difficulty that had to be completed blindfolded.

In both of the primary schools Mark Storor lead the initial workshop already described with each child working individually. But as the workshops developed the Out of Bounds journey was primarily in drama mode. As Cecily O'Neill (1995:57) has pointed out, *the dramatic world cannot exist without agreement to complicity in the creation of that world* and at both schools Storor worked to create the necessary trust between himself and each child and between the children themselves, without which the work could not develop the commitment necessary for it to be more than a superficial encounter.

Mark Storor's skill in engaging the children and encouraging them to become a group who could rise to the challenges set in each workshop was evident during the Out of Bounds workshops observed in both schools. The transformation of the school hall into a ritual space where the events of the journey could happen; the elevation of language and action from the literal to the metaphorical signifying a shift into an imagined world; the way the participation in the workshops developed from individual work to collaborative work; the creation of dramatic tension; the time for reflection all played a part in each workshop and Storor's ability to orchestrate these within the restraints of the space available led to the children working with concentration, collaboration and commitment.

The commitment the children showed to the work was evident to the staff involved at Worple Primary School. Michelle Nicholas, Learning Support Assistant who was present at all the workshops, observed a change in the class's willingness to engage with the challenges that were set as the relationship with Mark and with each other developed. Although she had worked with the class for two years and thought she knew them well she saw very different sides to many of them during the Out of Bounds workshops. During the workshops she observed an increasing trust in the process that Mark was leading them through:

A few children were quite self conscious and it was amazing to see how at first they were - like a lot of us adults are – that sceptical 'no! I don't think so! But very soon they really did join in.

She also saw unanticipated responses that enabled her to see the children in a new light:

I didn't realise that they had such big hearts I suppose. I always knew they were quite lovely but I didn't realise until this the care they showed each other. It was quite shocking to see that side of them.

In the post workshop discussions at Worples Primary School there was evidence to indicate that the experience of taking part also had an impact on the children's perceptions of themselves and the other children in the class. The children's reflection on their experience and what they thought they had learned about themselves gives an insight into the depth of commitment the class brought to the work:

The moment that was particularly important was the tiger because we had to learn that sometimes when we feel really scared we must not give in to our fear and just try it. Boy M

When we were doing the maze I lost it and I don't really like losing it. I find it emotional but then I kind of got through it. I've learnt that it's good to try even if you do fail and that bringing your emotions to things is a good thing because if no one knows your emotion how are they going to know how to treat you. I've understood that people can like look after you and they don't just hang around with their friends. Boy T

I can trust myself and I can take care of myself. I can trust my friends to rescue me and it was really fun this week – you don't have to feel bad if you fail the challenges so that felt really good. One thing I've learned is that I've learned about my friends and how they feel if they fail. Girl H

There is also moving evidence that participating in the workshops gave the class a deeper insight into Child L and his situation. Many of the children voiced a stronger sense of Child L being part of their class and could see things from his perspective:

When I heard it was L I was really shocked. Mark said it was a whole class thing so then I said L is in our class as well I had just forgot about him... and that just struck me to think that our class is actually special and we've got people that do have talents. Boy T

L wants us to understand about friendship Girl H

I think he wants us to understand that you can trust part of yourself and trust yourselves through anything. Boy M

During the project the children had communicated with Child L via Skype and as soon as he was strong enough Child L made a visit to the class. He was received, not as a stranger, but as a member of the class with whom the rest of the children felt a sense of connection.

He came into school and it felt really good because he was out of hospital. He has feelings as well and maybe he thought 'Oh I want to go to school and have fun'. Boy M

This is our class and L is a massive part of it and just to know that people who are in our class who are in hospital a lot of the time need our support so that they can just sail through it. He's really special and that's inspiring (sic) people because if you've got someone by you, and they stick by you, you won't feel scared all the way. Boy T

There is no doubt that the Out of Bounds workshops enabled links to be made between Worple Primary School and Evelina Hospital School in ways that Headteacher Manuela Beste, described as a *ripple that will last long after this project has ended*. At the end of the project ways of continuing the link between the schools were being discussed.

A strong commitment to Out of Bounds was also noted at Charles Dickens Primary, despite the school setting presenting challenges that were not present in the more self contained hall space at Worple. As Mark Storor notes:

It was much harder to hold the space at Charles Dickens that it was a Worple – because if I reflect back on it, it was constant noise all the time and yet you have to think of the children's achievements and it was fantastic.

Class teacher Teddy Crane noted that at the outset the children's responses and lack of focus concerned him. However as Out of Bounds progressed he observed changes in the children's commitment and responses to the work, including an increased willingness to take creative risks and to trust each other during the workshops. This enthusiasm was also noticed by parents, one of whom observed:

I know S really enjoyed it, really enjoyed the workshops. Sometimes he doesn't say what he did at school but he really enjoyed that. Several times he has said, 'it's the best thing we do at school - the best thing I've done.

Impact on achievement

Over the course of the Out of Bounds Hannah Perkins at Charles Dickens Primary found that the work had an impact on the way some children wrote and considers participation in the workshops as having encouraged *a change in boys' literacy levels because of the way that For the Best appealed to the imagination*. In her report to the school governors Hannah notes the boys' new found confidence in approaching writing:

You only have to look at the photos to see how involved they were and how thrilling they found it. They kept diaries of each workshop and several of the children who have previously almost literally been afraid to put pen to paper made enormous progress in terms of confidence and skill. (Charles Dickens Primary School Report to School Governors May 2009)

At Worplesdon Primary Y4 teacher Danielle Podsiadly had placed a less formal curriculum emphasis on the class's participation in Out of Bounds. She did, however, observe how the work permeated the rest of the week and how it made a particular impact on PHSE in circle time, for example where *it has really helped them to stay focused and listen to each other*. Being more prepared to listen to each other also developed children's confidence in speaking to the whole group. One girl in particular, who spoke at length during the final whole class reflection on the project, illustrates this development in confidence and self esteem observed by Ms Podsiadly:

I was really impressed with what S said because she's usually very quiet and she's only been in England for a couple of years. Her English isn't very good at all yet she got over the meaning of she wanted to say. I was really pleased that she spoke up, she doesn't usually.

"No one knew what they were doing at the beginning...then I saw some of the most powerful work I have ever encountered in my career...this is what we should be doing in schools."

Teddy Crane
Class teacher

It is also important to note that all of the teachers involved in the project acknowledged the rich learning that can emerge from an open ended creative process that does not naturally align itself to an objective driven curriculum. Their decisions to become involved rested in trusting Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard and the Unicorn Theatre, and in the way the project communicated very clear negotiated learning intentions. Despite the challenge of having to tolerate the uncertainty of the process at the outset as soon as work began in the classroom teachers acknowledged the quality of the engagement shown by the children in what was happening.



9 FOR THE BEST

"I was always confident that we would produce something meaningful and that Mark had the vision, experience and sensitivity to shape it into a very powerful and engaging theatre experience."

Gary Bates performer

Performers' Responses

The original proposal for For the Best included having primary school children participating alongside the professional performers. It was envisaged that the children would be pupils at either the mainstream school of one of the children who attended Evelina Hospital School or from a school identified by the Unicorn Theatre. However, to ensure that For the Best met the legal requirements regarding children's participation in live performance at the Unicorn Theatre it was necessary to involve two mainstream primary schools.

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The proposal to the Wellcome Trust makes reference to the 'highly experienced professional artists' who would be supporting Mark Storer in the creation of *For the Best*. Designer Cathy Wren; artist and designer Sofie Layton; film maker Babis Alexiadis; composer Jules Maxwell and photographer Andrew Whittuck were on the artistic team from the outset and some had already worked with Storer on previous projects. For example, in 2007 photographer Andrew Whittuck and composer Jules Maxwell had worked with Storer on *Boychild*, a project supported by the Wellcome Trust that explored attitudes and perceptions of maleness.

The artistic team were able to support the residencies at Evelina Hospital School and at Worple and Charles Dickens Schools by enabling Storer to respond to the ideas and responses of the children with an immediacy that might not otherwise have been possible. For example, the image of the tiger that appeared as metaphor in Child L's poem was transformed by puppeteer Sofie Layton into a representation of a tiger. This tiger mask was then given physical presence by performer Gary Bates in the *Out of Bounds* workshops at the two primary schools which enabled the children to encounter it within the context of the journey created by the drama work.

Whilst the artistic team were part of the project from the outset the performers who took part in *For the Best* auditioned for the roles. Andy Manley, Erika Poole; Katherine Hart, Keli Brown; Gary Bates and Michael Lyle were cast for the skills, expertise and experience they could bring to their roles in the performance. With the exception of Andy Manley and Gary Bates, who had taken part in *Best Behaviour* (2003), none of the performers had worked with Storer before.

Central to Mark Storer's work, and highlighted in the original proposal for *For the Best*, is his commitment to creating performance that uses as its inspiration significant moments from the stories of the participants whose experiences are at the heart of the work. Throughout the devising of the performance all of the artists and performers were aware that they were working in collaboration with the participants at the hospital school and that discovering ways to tell their story carried a responsibility to the source material. But this, in Keli Brown's view, *was not a burden, never a hard task and we were never asked to represent the children but to take their stories and respond to them.*

Devising *For the Best* was never a replicatory process, as

Keli Brown pointed out above, but a generative one that required the performers to work through both personal and professional response to the material. During the first preparatory workshop, as he introduced the way they would be working, Mark Storor emphasised the connection between this performers' personal engagement with the work and the artists' eye they would have to maintain throughout:

It has to be about us. We have to put in our hearts, our all. It's about the deepest feelings we don't have words for. We have to pay attention to the accidental ...what we couldn't have known this morning. We cannot compromise. We have to work within a framework and keep it as pure as possible, for as long as possible. In the performance we're going to be creating a language that doesn't exist yet.

In the first rehearsal Storor worked with the performers in the same way that he had worked with the children on dialysis and, in the same way, they too found ways to express their sense of self first through drawing, then through metaphorical language which was in turn translated into images contained within a life sized outline of themselves.. Having the shared experience of starting point, and participating in the same process, illuminated for the performers the ways in which the images created by the children reflected, not a literal account of being on dialysis, but their experience of living with the renal failure. For Storor drawing connections between the experiences of the children on dialysis and their parents and those of the performers engaged in creating the performance seems to provide the anchor for the devising process.

The responses from the performers acknowledge the challenges they faced in the devising process where sometimes, as Gary Bates puts it, *we felt that we were rudderless and going round in circles but as a performer I had to let go and go with that in order to sometimes reach a 'truth'.* Despite the freedoms experienced in the devising process, Gary is also aware that Mark ensured that they never lost sight of the origins of the project:

He gave us information and ideas from the children in a very careful way that enabled us as performers to explore ideas fully, examine them, unpick them, twist them, squeeze them, turn them upside down and combine them with our own life experiences to form a creative response.

Mark Storer and Anna Ledgard recognised that there would be significant potential for professional development for the performers who took part in For the Best and this is evident in the proposal document which includes outcomes that focus on the impact of the project on the artists and their future practice. The reflections of Erika Poole, Gary Bates and Kate Hart indicate that their involvement in the project has indeed had significant impact on their perceptions of themselves as performers.

Throughout the journey Erika Poole felt herself to be *in safe hands and well nourished creatively, emotionally and spiritually*. She considered working with Mark and the other artists and performers *one of the most profound and enriching experiences* she has had in her professional life and one that has enabled her to grow as an actor.

Aerial performer Kate Hart commented on how daunting it was initially to work with Storer because he had already had *several months of living this project* but that his ability to instil confidence and trust enabled her to develop her professional skills. She recognises how the importance of honouring the source material that was emphasised by Mark Storer during the devising process enabled her to develop *more confidence in her belief that circus skills can be drama and not tricks*.

Working with Storer on Best Behaviour had already had a significant impact on Gary Bates' perceptions of acting and theatre and he sees For the Best as *the most creative, moving and inspiring work that I have done as a performer*. Having worked with Storer before Bates was always confident that *we would produce something meaningful and that Mark had the vision, experience and sensitivity to shape it into a very powerful and engaging theatre experience*.

10 FOR THE BEST

"It was like we had a family everyone was backing us up following us around and asking us questions – we had back up!"

Young performer Charles Dickens School

Childrens' Participation

An invitation to participate in the performance was extended all the children at Worple and Charles Dickens Primary Schools who had been part of the Out of Bounds workshops. Parents in each school were invited to a meeting where the children's role in For the Best was discussed and permission sought to allow their child to be part of the performance. Of the children in Year 3/4 Barkis Class at Charles Dickens Primary 24 out of 30 children chose to participate and parental permission given. At Worple Primary 18 out of a class of 24 children chose to participate and parental permission was given.

Legal obligations governing children's participation in live theatre performances and the Child Protection Act were adhered to throughout the run.

When the performances took place during school time Worple Primary School ensured that staff were available to accompany the children to the theatre. Due to the distance from the Unicorn, this was a challenge for the school and presented the staff with significant organisational issues that had to be overcome. But, in class teacher Danielle Podsiadly's view, this was worthwhile. Not only did she see the opportunity to be involved in the performance as having a positive impact on the children she also viewed the journey to the theatre as an enriching educational experience:

It was good for them to have a long journey and the children loved it. So many of them had never been on the tube or the train so to go way into London was unbelievable.

Children from Charles Dickens School walked to the Unicorn accompanied by either a member of school staff or a chaperone from the Unicorn.

The consistently reliable attendance shown by the children throughout the run is an indication of the commitment the children, their parents and the schools showed to being part of the performance. One child from Worple School, faced with having to make a choice about how he would like to spend his Saturday afternoon, showed an understanding of the responsibility being part of a performance:

I had to choose between to go to the beach or to go do the show and I chose the show because it was the last time and I didn't want to let you down.

Parents were willing to bring children at the weekend and in many cases the effort this took did not go unnoticed by the children. When asked what meant the most to them about being involved in For the Best, for example, one girl at Charles Dickens responded:

My Mum – when she brought me even though she was tired.

The role of the children

The children who performed in For the Best did not have a role in the devising of the performance. All of the children were introduced to the role they would play during one rehearsal. There was no characterisation to their role beyond playing themselves as guides for the audience - insiders who were a part of the puzzle, as the cluster of jigsaw parts pinned on their tee shirts which referred back to one of the Out of Bounds workshops, indicated.

Three children took part in each performance and they were the first performers that the audience encountered: a child pulled the curtain that marked the opening; another invited the audience into the wallpapered corridor where the life of the Haemo family was revealed. They guided the audience through the rooms that showed moments in the life of the family, drawing attention to details that

might otherwise have passed unnoticed. They helped the transformations between scenes including dressing the Sick Princess and soothing the Night Bear when he took refuge in the Haemo's bed, and in the final moments of the performance they lead the audience through the doors to the outside.

Ann Lecker-Chewiwi, on placement with the Unicorn as part of her studies on the MA Course on Applied Theatre at Goldsmiths University, was one of the team responsible for chaperoning the children during *For the Best*. During the fifteen times that she watched the performance in her role as chaperone, Ann noted the consistent enthusiasm and excitement shown by the children at being part of performance and how they were quite at home in the whole theatre building. However, she also observed the different degrees to which each child engaged with the performance and how the understanding of what the performance was about and their role in it varied from child to child. Many of the children were constantly alert to what was going on around them and their awareness of themselves as performers in the piece was evident in their body posture; their active involvement with the audience and their engagement with the performance even if the limelight was not on them. She also, however, observed others who found it hard to stay focused and engaged throughout the whole performance and were easily distracted. Two children from Charles Dickens Primary School stood out for Ann not only because of their professional handling of the audience but their ongoing reflections on the themes of the piece expressed in impromptu interventions like writing 'The Mother is Faithful' with the Scrabble pieces the character of the Sick Princess spits out onto the floor.

The different degrees to which each child engaged with the performance and the varying ways in which the adults present managed their role during the performance was also noted by Catherine Greenwood Education and Youth Director at the Unicorn and by *For the Best* producer Anna Ledgard. However, as Ledgard notes, to have had the children involved at a deeper level and integrated into the performance in a more significant way would have required a much longer residency in school and more time with the performers *and there was neither resources nor personnel to facilitate this*.

It is worth noting, however, the inclusive approach shown by Mark Storor in inviting all of the children who had participated in the Out of Bounds workshops to be part of For the Best. All those who wanted to take part did so and in each of the classes there was a range of experience, ability and maturity which was reflected in the ways the children took on their role in the performance. Some of the children rose immediately to the task with extraordinary intuition, understanding and skill whilst others grew into their roles over the run.

11 CHILDREN'S RESPONSES

"I had to put the dress on the princess and I didn't know what to do at first and I learned from my mistakes."

*Child performer
Charles Dickens School*

At Charles Dickens Primary School the children were given the opportunity to reflect on their experience of being involved in the For the Best during a class discussion where everyone had the opportunity to give their responses to being involved in the performance.

The discussion opened with one child commenting that seeing children being part of a performance was not usual:

What's more amazing is that you don't see children do that.

There was general agreement that the role had been an unusual one which is perhaps a recognition that For the Best did not conform to the children's previous experience of theatre. Children had felt supported by everyone and had *felt like we had a family, everyone was backing us up following us around and asking us questions, we had back up*. However, one of the striking responses from the children during this discussion was the emphasis they placed on practising at home:

I practised doing the light at home. It was my own invention and my dad made the light stay on and I put a toy dummy in the chair.

I practised at home – I'd put music on and I'd pull the curtains.

I practised at home with my baby sister – we'd do acting and she'd do the curtain.

I practised being confident, I put on calm music and didn't start laughing.

The children were not asked to rehearse at home or to practice any elements of their role in the performance but many chose to. In living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms in Southwark eight year old children altered the furniture, found toys and clothes to represent characters, played music and asked their family to join them in practising their roles in For the Best. This offers some indication of the level of engagement and commitment shown by the children who were involved.

Many of the children, at both Charles Dickens and Worple Primary, were aware of the skills they had acquired during their participation in the performance and this is reflected in the comment book where they could choose to write after each performance. Their entries show evidence of their ability to take on the responsibility of being part of a professional production where attention to detail was important:

Remember what to do - try to stay on cue.

Don't be nervous, be positive – tell yourself to concentrate.

We don't touch the props because we don't know how touching, moving something could affect the performance.

I was most impressed when I got things right and helping the audience through the door.

Being involved in For the Best gave the children an opportunity to expand their understanding of the theatre and broaden their appreciation of the range of skills and abilities that contribute to creating a performance. From one boy's perspective there was also a memorable moment when he experienced his parents seeing him in role and not responding to him in the way he expected:

When I was doing the light and my parents were there I smiled and they looked at me like they had never seen me before.

The children who participated in For the Best responded to the performance on a range of levels as the entries in the comment book indicate. Many children were able to connect elements of the performance to the Out of Bounds workshops:

When the dad is just quiet in the shower it's like when we do freeze frames in the workshops.

I know why they made crumbs around the mum because when we were doing our portraits (Mark) drew over us, so in the show it's the same but different.

Others recorded their concerns for the family in the comment book:

I was worried about Milo because he got pretend dialysis.

Dad has a lot on his mind - the future, Milo and the whole family.

Dear Daddy Haemo I hope that you try to keep the family stuck together and try you hardest.

Dear Mummy Haemo, I can understand why you may be feeling sad or worried at the moment. However, Milo is in good hands. His nurse is doing a perfect job of looking after him and he will get better in the end.

As has already been noted, the responses of many of the children deepened over the course of the run and, as one child commented, each time you watch it, it gets better and better. The performance demanded from the audience a highly attuned ability to infer and interpret and there is some evidence that repeated viewing as part of For the Best enabled some of the child performers to enter into increasing complex 'performance of meaning' as their understanding of the Haemo family's situation deepened:

I never knew why Milo couldn't eat. It's a very sad story. I saw someone with tears in their eyes.

Child L's cartoon - I thought it was funny at first but then I got used to it and it made me cry.

The princess - when she heard the Night Bear I laughed, then I felt how she felt and I felt ashamed.

In the view of Child T at Worple Primary School being involved For the Best enabled him to gain new insight into Child L's life and created a level of affective engagement with the performance that he had never before experienced at the theatre:

One of our trips was going to see Peter Pan in a theatre and there was loads of people there. But it didn't really have a moral at all – not really - but the performance we done had really good morals. It showed me how L feels, him being pulled away from his family. I think the Night Bear was there to show L was pulled away from his family – just so people could realise what he was going through. That actual theatre is magic - because it got me – I'm not someone that is easy to get the word across to and that really did open me up and made me say Wow! Don't judge a book by its cover, you know, let yourself think.



12 PARENTS' RESPONSES TO CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

"Something was lost in translation and transition from the workshops to the performance. "

Parent A

"I thought it was brilliant ... it was all really real for me and very powerful."

Parent B

Overall there was positive parental support for children's participation in *For the Best* at both schools and many parents expressed their appreciation for the experience it gave their child. One child and his parents from Charles Dickens School Primary thanked the Unicorn for the opportunity of a life time and, in a thank you card to Anna Ledgard, a child from Worple Primary School wrote *Thank You My mum said that I can watch For the Best or other shows*. Many parents also expressed their thanks and appreciation at the end of performances to members of the Unicorn and to Anna Ledgard and Mark Storor.

However, there were concerns raised by a very small group of parents from Charles Dickens School which it is important to consider. This group of parents, all of whom had given permission for their children to participate in the production, expressed reservations about their children's involvement in *For the Best* once they had seen the performance and, in one case, doubts were expressed as to whether *For the Best* was appropriate for children. An after school meeting was arranged at which parents were invited to discuss any concerns they had with Anna Ledgard, Mark Storor and Cath Greenwood.

Parent A could not attend the meeting, but responded by e-mail to Cath Greenwood at the Unicorn. She commented that, whereas Out of Bounds had *had a significant impact on their son and had obviously stimulated his imagination and learning*, she thought it significant that although he was excited about the prospect of being involved in the performance, he had been unable to tell his parents *what the performance was about even following his involvement in the dress rehearsal*. The child in question was not withdrawn from the performance although parent A commented that both she and her husband, who both saw For the Best on two occasions, found the *story and the actual involvement of the children quite obtuse and it seemed deliberately so* and that both she and her husband felt *somewhat bewildered* by it. At one performance parent A's concerns were exacerbated by *seeing younger children getting upset and distressed*.

Parent A found the portrayal of the characters provided *extremely negative stereotypes within a dysfunctional family* and that the female characters were unnecessarily sexualised which, in her opinion, *did not provide positive female role models or promote equality*. *I am not sure*, she wrote, *that the message and the underlying 'stories' of the children it was about were reflected in the performance*. As an information and educational tool to provide insight into these families it was *quite disturbing*. Without having had the opportunity to discuss the matter further Parent A's opinion seems to be governed by what she considers theatre should offer children and, in her view, the performance failed to meet those expectations.

Only one parent attended the meeting for concerned parents to discuss For the Best. In common with parent A, parent B also commented on the perceived lack of connection between the Out of Bounds workshops and the performance of For the Best, although he did not share the view that the performance was *obtuse*. On the contrary, he enjoyed it and thought it a serious *subject creatively and originally done and in some respects quite challenging*. His son had enjoyed the workshops, finding them *the best thing he had done at school* but he, too, had been unable to tell his parents what For the Best was about. In interview parent B also voiced his wife's opinion, which chimes with parent A, in that she found it *quite challenging and quite strange and ... thought that it might be frightening for children*.

However, in contrast to both his wife's reported opinion and parent A's comments, parent B found that For the Best reflected *some very real experiences* he himself had been through with his family. He also recognised that the performance had shown the difficulties that families face when a child is in hospital. When that had happened to their family parent B had discovered that:

It's not just about being sick, it's about the experience of being in hospital, and going to appointments and the pressure that puts on the family and the tension created between parents. The thing of having to look after a sick child – you haven't got time, you can't get to sleep, you're worried, the child's life is in danger – you worry about death, you know - there are lots of concerns and it tackled all of these issues so it was really real for me and very powerful.

For the Best had a direct connection to parent B's experience as the father of a child who has had to attend hospital and his response to the performance and his acknowledgement of the empathetic resonance he experienced reflects this. However, as the father of a son who was in the performance, he voiced reservations about how *much his son interpreted out of it*. These reservations were balanced, however, by positive regard for what he considers his son has gained by being involved in performance:

he enjoyed being part of a professional performance of a children's play at a professional venue with professional actors. And I think it has done his confidence a lot of good and probably his appreciation of theatre in general.

According to parent B, some parents with whom he had discussed the performance had expectations about what theatre for children should be and, as *they were going to see their children in a play at a children's theatre*, they expected the performance to *have a child like feeling, to have more humour and generally be more child like or childish maybe*.

The responses of the parents are a reminder as Helen Freshwater (2009:5) points out, that audiences are not a single entity and that there are 'multiple contingencies' which 'condition an individual's interpretation of a particular performance event.' This has particular significance regarding work for young children where teachers, parents and other adults perform a mediating role, making judgements about appropriateness and relevance. The divergence of opinion evident amongst the group of parents at Charles Dickens School is echoed in the views expressed by teachers at Meridian School in Section 15. This gatekeeping role has, quite rightly, a strong presence in children's education but there are questions that arise in relation to what is suitable theatre for children – which was also discussed during the Symposium – that deserve continuing discussion in a wider arena.



13 AUDIENCE RESPONSES

"Just to say thank you for putting across L's life so well"

Child L's Mother

Audience members were invited to make written responses to the performance in comment books that were available in the Unicorn foyer.

One of the unforeseen difficulties in gathering audience responses after the performance lay in the shape of the piece. The performance began in the foyer but the final exit from the space was through the scene dock which brought the audience out into the street at the back of the theatre. Although they were invited to return to the foyer for discussion this was not an obligation and, consequently, this did not necessarily happen.

An evaluation questionnaire was given to the teachers who accompanied their classes to see *For the Best* and they were asked to return these to the Unicorn. This resulted in a poor return but the comments on those that did respond were positive, although brief. However, one of the evaluations does give an insight into impact of *For the Best* on a class of pupils with learning difficulties. They found the experience both engaging and their teacher thought that the performance *showed them a different route for coping*. The class were *all intrigued by the production and by the fact they weren't sitting in the typical theatre structure*. In post show discussion they asked questions about the practical day to day difficulties of living with renal failure and, according to the teacher, many were made *more aware that difficulties can be overcome*.

However, in depth interviews were conducted with teachers and children at Meridian School where six classes had been booked to see the performance. (see section 15)

The Comment Book

All of the written comments expressed positive opinions although some, 30 in all, made brief general responses such as: *Brilliant; Crazy and cool; Amazing; Very different, very interesting; It was kinda scary but it was great; I loved it but it was a bit weird.* All of which are valid responses and indicate a level of engagement and enjoyment and it is important to recognise that immediately after a theatre performance it is, as one comment states, *too soon to shape words.*

Many of those who contributed to the comment books, however, were more reflective. For the Best set out 'to raise awareness of living with life threatening illness' and audience members commented on the way in which *the performance altered their perceptions of family and illness:*

Extremely moving. This says so much about what it feels like to be a sick child, to be the parent of a sick child, to be the family of a sick child and to have hope.

Thank you; I am a teacher of young people with medical needs. This is a brilliant piece of work

Thank you – a very thought provoking display of emotions and the roller coaster ride of illness

Exceptional and beautiful poetry - a truly relatable experience for those who know what it is like to suffer in and outside of family situations, especially those infected with illness

Being sick is like being inside a nightmare and being well is like being inside a happy dream. This play evokes both dream states - the beauty and the horror of the cycles of life and death, and celebrates the human spirit that endures through it all. Thanks to everyone involved;

had to face my inability to cope with illness - so moving and thought provoking and brilliant in its simplicity.

I was gutted when the dreaded death was closing in and I burst with joy and hysterical laughter when the human spirit won this time and teddies flew in the air.

One of the aims of the project was to create 'an innovatory piece of theatre which pushes the boundaries of theatre language' and many of the responses celebrated For the Best as an original and moving piece of theatre:

Congratulations – you have rewritten the rules for children's' theatre

Captivating, moving, a unique and beautiful piece of work, so glad to have seen it.

What an absolute treat. I think this is the best piece of site specific theatre I've ever witnessed. So moving, thought provoking, stunning images and sound. Well done!

Absolutely breathtaking - what a journey – emotional and beautiful. Thank you.

I really liked it but quite confusing – I thought it was brilliantly put together.

Deeply moving, affective and important work. Congratulations to all.

What a wonderful creation this show is. All theatre should be an experience like this, a unique, inspirational, touching and truly imaginative experience. I laughed – I cried – it will stay with me 4 life.

Very true and operating at a level that shocked me. I didn't think I would be so moved. You bypassed my intellect with ease.

There are two comments that are worth drawing attention to from the mother and grandfather of children who participated in the performance, although, due to the anonymity of the statements, it is impossible to know which schools the children attended. They do, however, provide an interesting counterpoint to the views expressed by a small group of parents at Charles Dickens discussed in Section 13:

I am not surprised that my grandson could not tell me much about it beforehand. As a healthy person I'm thinking now that I don't sympathise much with those who are often sick. Obviously it is your own individual thought on the production. My personal view is if my child is happy and enjoyed being part of the show, I am happy. I got what I could from it and it was very capturing.(sic)



14 REVIEWS AND AWARDS

There was significant critical acclaim for For the Best. It received five star reviews in London listing magazine Time Out, where it was The Critics Choice, and in The Guardian. The Guardian Guide also gave it a special mention in the Pick of the Week list. There were also positive reviews in The Stage and The Evening Standard.

On line reviews were also posted at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/jun/05/review-for-the-best>

<http://www.blogs.whatsonstage.com/2009/06/16/doctor-theatre-comes-to-the-unicorn>

Local press coverage consisted of reviews in the Southwark News and the Hounslow Press. The attendance of HRH Camilla Duchess of Cornwall prompted further interest by the local press and radio and the visit was reported on the palace website.

For the Best was awarded Best Show for Children and Young People for 2009 which is a prestigious national award given by the Theatre Management Association (TMA), for significant contribution to theatre



15 RESPONSES FROM MERIDIAN SCHOOL

The publicity for For the Best suggested the performance was appropriate for children age 6+ and, in view of this recommendation, Meridian School in Greenwich booked to bring the six classes in Key Stage 1 and 2. The decision to bring the children was based on using the theatre visit as support for the whole school art and writing project that was to take place in the summer term. The content of the performance was not a consideration in their decision to come to the Unicorn. Despite being sent a copy of the Teachers Resources in advance of these appearing on the Unicorn website and discussing the nature of the performance with Cath Greenwood, Director of Education and Youth at the Unicorn, the Year 4 children were not introduced to For the Best before arriving at the theatre.

Year 4

"To be fair, half of my class loved it - difficult children in the class were mesmerised."

Year 4 teacher

Children in Year 4, who are aged eight and nine, were the first class to see For the Best and they were accompanied by their class teacher and the Head Teacher. After watching the performance themselves and seeing the responses of the children, many of whom, in the teacher's opinion, seemed confused, the teachers involved decided to cancel the booking for Year 1, 2 and 3 as they considered For the Best to be unsuitable for younger audiences. The school did, however, retain the booking for the Year 5 and Year

6 classes which reiterates the point already raised about the gatekeeper role that teachers and other adults play in deciding what is appropriate theatre for young children.

Within the context of this evaluation, where critical acclaim for *For the Best* is evident, insight into the school's reasons for cancelling their tickets deserves closer attention. The responses to *For the Best* of the Year 5 and 6 teachers and children who did come to a performance provides helpful illumination of what can enable children to become confident theatre goers.

In interview one of the main reservations the Year 4 teacher had about *For the Best* was the combination of the form and the content, both of which, in her view, took the children out of their comfort zone. She considered the relationship of the audience to the action confused some of the children and *they weren't sure who were the audience and who were the actors*. She also thought the way the theatre building was used had *put them off their guard* and as a result some of them had felt trapped both *in the illness and physically trapped in lift*. The teacher had, however, no objection to the theme of the performance but thought the difficulty lay, for some children, in being present within the action. She compared the visit to reading and suggested *that if you read a book to children about death or illness you know you can stop. A book isn't real, but this felt real. It was real to some of the children*.

In her view, if the performance had adhered to theatre conventions with which the children were familiar it would have provided a physical distance which contained the action and kept the children feeling safe. The way in which *For the Best* broke the familiar conventions made it difficult for some children to distinguish between illusion and reality which in turn lead some of them to be unsettled and anxious during the performance. The episodic structure, which made it difficult to predict what might happen next, also contributed to this. However, the class teacher also thought this would not have been a problem for the children had there been a *lighter theme*. Despite her reservations, however, she also acknowledged that *half of the class loved it* and that:

the difficult children in the class were mesmerised. They just can't stop talking about it – there was so much to look at. The fact that the action was happening all around and they didn't know what was going to happen next was exciting for them, they felt involved.

Matthew Reason (2008:10) points out, that for young children *the theatrical form itself may be the principal 'meaning' of some performances*. In the case of For the Best it was impact of the performance that the Year 4 children talked about on their return to school. Although the form was not the 'principal meaning' in For the Best, one of the objectives of the work was to produce *an innovative and original theatre performance... which will experiment with the ways in which audiences interact with performance*. The boldness with which Storor achieved this challenged many adult audience members' expectations of theatre. For young audiences in particular, whose experience of theatre is limited by age and, in many cases, by opportunity, it is not surprising that the immediacy of the form had a vivid impact.

Being responsible for thirty children when you are not sure what to expect yourself is a difficult position to be in, especially if you perceive the theatrical experience as offering no sense of distance to provide emotional safety. The decision to withdraw the younger classes from attending the performance was based on the Headteacher and Class Teacher's assessment of the Year 4's responses and, consequently, their judgement of For the Best's suitability for younger children.

Year 5 and 6

"It was like a puzzle. You had to think of all the things and put them together. If I saw it again I'd see it differently - like a film – you realise it more. I'd have a different point of view next time "

Year 6 boy

The Year 5 and Year 6 teachers at the school had the opportunity to discuss For the Best with the teachers who had already been to the Unicorn before taking their classes. In both cases they discussed the class's visit beforehand and paid particular attention to giving the children a perspective from which to view the performance.

Year 6 teacher made connections to personal experience by discussing the background to the piece; the nature of kidney failure; their experiences of being in hospital; the environment you might find there. She also discussed theatre with the class, drawing their attention to previous experience of seeing plays and made connections with the work they had been doing in class. She talked with the class about how For the Best would be like nothing they had seen before and encouraged them to go with an open mind. She also

made connection to the curriculum but without constraining the children:

I wanted them to think about the work we had done on metaphor and figurative language ... so I said wanted them to be thinking about that too and to see if they could spot ways in which it has been done in theatre – no straight comparisons – just be open to it.

During the performance the class teacher noticed different types of reactions from the children: some seemed intimidated and held back and others really wanted to join in. There were some children who were in tears but not, she pointed out, through fear but because they were moved by the events that were unfolding and they understood that *something had happened that was emotional*.

In classroom discussion, after seeing the performance, the children debated what For the Best meant which the class teacher saw as helping them to realise *that there was no one meaning and that they could interpret it for themselves*. Their interpretations were focused within the context of the performance and the experience of the Haemo family. The children's responses to the Sick Princess, in particular, surprised their class teacher because they made her think again about the scene:

They thought the lady on the trapeze spitting out the letters was to do with her trying to put her illness into words. They thought she was trying to say how she feels and that nobody understands her.

In preparing her class to see For the Best the Year 5 teacher had also emphasised the need for inference and interpretation, making comparisons between reading theatre performance and reading contemporary picture books by writers and illustrators, such as Neil Gaiman and Shaun Tan, where they had to work to bridge the gaps in the text in order to create meaning. This enabled the class to understand that watching the performance would need an active engagement with what they saw rather than a passive reception of the spectacle. In both the Year 5 and Year 6 classes the teachers understood the essential role that reflective talk plays in enabling the children to negotiate meaning. These short transcripts of some of Year 6's responses give some insight into the confidence with which they were able to discuss the performance and what it meant to them.

Transcripts

Transcript A:

- 1: What was with the Night Bear?
- 2: He was like death ...
- 3: and the cabbages were like a person ...
- 2: ..like a person's life and when he got hold of that person and got them down to the core he had them ...
- 1: He looked like a man with no skin, just ribs
- 2: They couldn't see him sliding round the room – there was no eye contact
- 3: When he tried to take their son away ...
- 4: they fight death for their son ...
- 3: ... to protect him ... protect their son against anything
- 1: He was also touching them and they didn't notice... he was like their feelings

Transcript B:

- 5: I didn't get the man in the shower
- T: Does anyone want to say anything about the man in the shower?
- 6: He was rinsing away his feelings ...
- 7: ... to cool him down . . he was thinking too much about his son
- 6: May be he's fed up thinking about what might happen.

Transcript C:

- 5: I didn't get the man on the balcony
- 6: maybe he was ripping up people's lives...
- 4: ..but he's not death, he's the dad
- 8: Sometimes when people die you rip up paper things – I saw it on TV
- 4: He was fed up reading about dialysis.
- 6: It's like the family separating, being ripped up, their lives being ripped up
- 5: All the people that ain't got that illness should be grateful.

The children were also able to reflect on the ways in which form and meaning interconnected and the impact this had on them as viewers.

Transcript D

- 2: I liked the end, it was clever, like not just going back to where you started
- 3: You wouldn't really think that would happen in a play
- 6: When you start it's like you're going through the stages of life, you can't go back, you have to go forward.
- 5: I didn't get it when death was just hanging there
- 6: His job had failed
- 4: You can't have no death. There's always death, like in Discworld or The Simpsons

Transcript F

- T: How was it to be an audience in amongst the actors?
- 3: It made it seem as if it was an everyday thing like every day - a daily day – they acted like you weren't there. It was their normal day, like they have every day, especially the bit where the boy, where Milo, is on dialysis. It happens to him everyday and that must be very tiring, just sitting there and being in amongst it made you feel it was real.

These brief transcripts highlight the importance of reflective and collaborative talk, or 'interthinking', to use Mercer's term, in enabling new insights about For the Best to emerge. The children respond thoughtfully and perceptively to the performance that several children described as a 'puzzle'. They admit confusion; negotiate possible meanings; change and extend each other's perception; reflect on the significance of the structure; and make connections to experience and to other secondary worlds. Doing so enabled them to get close to the heart of the experiences of the Haemo family.

As Meridian Primary School was not involved in the creation of For the Best the responses from the Year 5 and 6 teachers and their classes gives valuable evidence of young children's capacity to respond with sensitivity and depth to a piece of theatre that was challenging for experienced and inexperienced theatre goers alike.



16 PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships at the Unicorn Theatre

The Unicorn Theatre is dedicated to creating theatre for children and young people that is both imaginative and challenging, placing their voice and identity at the heart of the work.

This was reflected in the first Education-led production, *In the Box*, that was part of the opening of the theatre in 2005 which celebrated the values of the Unicorn's participatory programme and brought the voice of the child to the Clore Theatre at the heart of the new building. *For the Best* was the second performance in the theatre programme generated by the Education team led by Cath Greenwood, the Unicorn's Education and Youth Director.

"For the Best is a project that demands bravery and sensitivity - and a special kind of artistic talent. That is why we chose to do this project with this artist and his very talented team."

*Tony Graham Artistic Director
Unicorn Theatre*

The formation of the partnership between Mark Storer and Anna Ledgard and the Unicorn theatre took place over a series of meetings and discussions but in addition there was a sharing of Mark's creative process. Storer ran a two day workshop with members of the Artistic and Education teams at the Unicorn which enabled them to experience the ways in which he generated material through a process of sharing personal stories. It was after this workshop that the Unicorn agreed to ahead with the partnership.

Both Cath Greenwood and the Unicorn's artistic director, Tony Graham, recognised in Mark Storer's work a respect for the subject matter and an artistic vision that reflected that of the theatre. Graham acknowledges that Storer's projects

were hard to categorise and that his approach lead him on a search for the authentic voice via unorthodox pathways but that his work also had the kind of rigorous, demanding approach that the Unicorn was looking for. In For the Best Graham and Greenwood saw:

a project that demands bravery and sensitivity - and a special kind of artistic talent. That is why we chose to do this project with this artist and his very talented team.

Education

The project was to cover the span of an academic year, starting in September with the work in the hospital and culminating with performances in June. Cath Greenwood wanted the Education Department to make the most of this rare opportunity to take the lead on the artistic programme in the building.

For Unicorn Education the partnership was hugely enriching and gave members of the team a chance to view Mark's process up close, to be part of discussions along the way and chart the process from start to finish. However as the project unfolded it became evident that there wasn't really a specific role for the education team to take. In Cath Greenwood's view *the project was totally formed artistically and pedagogically from the outset and, probably most crucially, there was a great deal of overlap between what Anna Ledgard does as an essential part of Mark's process and the kind of work I might do. As a result Greenwood, often felt the involvement was incidental rather than integral to the work.*

There were also other external factors which were wholly understandable, but that further distanced the education team from a fuller involvement in the process. For example, the restrictions at the hospital because of concerns about cross infections and the delicate nature of the interaction with the children meant that it wasn't appropriate for members of the education team to go into the Renal Unit. Nonetheless, the partnership with the education team worked well with in all the educational settings with good communication throughout the process at Evelina Hospital School where Greenwood was present at meetings with the teaching team; at Worple Primary School and at Charles Dickens

Primary School where Greenwood was instrumental in the initial liaison.

However, it became more difficult when the process moved into the theatre. Greenwood sees this as *partly to do with competing pressures for the education team, expectations from Mark and Anna and a shift in gear.*

One of the key responsibilities for the education team during For the Best was to manage the children performing in the piece whilst they were in the building. Early on in the process Cath Greenwood and Anna Ledgard realised that the aim to have three children a part of each performance, including Saturdays and Sundays, would be demanding and Unicorn education did not have the capacity to cover that from within the department. It was agreed that an additional person should be employed to help manage this and Ally Walsh was brought on board to work the evenings and weekend shifts. Greenwood notes the additional pressure that was then revealed in the last week of rehearsals when decisions were made about where the children would be as part of the audience's journey and what they would do. It became very clear that *even more CRB checked staff were needed than originally thought; some children were required to sit in a small lobby area in the dark with members of the audience, obviously an adult chaperone would be needed to be with them in that space.*

The realisation that many more staff were needed in order to comply with child safety requirements put a strain on the whole For the Best team and on an education department already overstretched by other commitments at the theatre. The solution was for everyone at the Unicorn to take on as many shifts as possible, and for the team to find volunteers to ensure watertight adherence to the regulations surrounding child performers.

As a result of the unforeseen complications surrounding this final stage of the project communication between Ally Walsh and the education team became difficult at times. This was partly to do with an overlap of roles but it was also because of an increasingly pressured atmosphere in the theatre as the performances neared.

In reviewing how communication could have clearer during this period of the project Cath Greenwood's suggests that regular review meetings with Anna Ledgard might have prevented the tensions that arose. Meetings with

the Education team did not happen after April 2009 when the emphasis shifted to working on the production. Ledgard recognises that communication, although effectively handled with the production team during that time, became less clear with Education. Consequently there was no forum to discuss what was happening or to air the associated feelings. As Ledgard commented:

it was extremely complicated and it seems we were balanced between too many cooks and cooperation!

According to Greenwood, despite any difficulties that arose the experience of working on For the Best has been very positive and there is much for the education team to draw on in future work with young people. Mark Storor's willingness to talk about the participatory process in all of the settings as part of ongoing reflection on the nature of the work was an important aspect of the partnership:

There have been endless fascinating and important conversations along the way - (on trains, in hospital waiting areas, walking down the street - about the nature of theatre and participatory practice which will inform the Unicorn's work for years to come.

Teachers Resources

The Teacher Resources for For the Best were created by the Education department. Resources, as Greenwood points out, *play a huge role for our organisation in building a bridge between the classroom and the performance* and the resources for For the Best set out to enable teachers to prepare their class for seeing the performance and to create an educational context for the work.

The educational approach taken by the resources was welcomed by both Ledgard and Manuela Beste, Headteacher at Evelina Hospital School. Beste was asked to respond before they were placed online to ensure that the content was appropriate, particularly when there were references to the renal unit and the impact of renal failure. She commented:

This is superb stuff! I was really impressed

and suggested that schools might be interested in visiting the hospital school to find out more.

Production

During the creation of For the Best Adam Carree, the Unicorn's Production Manager, worked in close partnership with Mark Storer. In the first discussions they had Storer seemed, according to Carree, to be sceptical about the role that he would play, assuming that it would be an imposition of a very structured theatre approach that might be *unhelpful for the creative process*. However, once a working relationship was established between them, in Carree's view, it became *out of all the people in the building the one that was the most collaborative*. For example, Carree was not only production manager, he was also responsible for lighting the performance and in so doing he considers he had an artistic say in what happened:

We walked the journey together, putting a finger on what would make it better and I learned about Mark's eye for things. We didn't really speak about how I would light the piece, it just evolved and I created pictures around his pictures.

In Carree's perception For the Best lay on the boundary between theatre and art installation and working with Storer was very much like working alongside an installation artist. So, in order to ensure that Storer had a team of people who would be sympathetic to his way of working, when it came to engaging stage managers Carree chose people that he thought would be in tune with Storer's creative process:

I went for some unusual characters, people that I wouldn't necessarily put on another show because the remit would be wider and broader than I would normally ask stage managers to do - people who would go beyond their normal expected duties - who were very organised and had somewhat of an artistic eye.

Tensions that did arise, according to Carree, were about timing. Because of the intensity of Storer's devising process, extracting firm design decisions about the set proved difficult, particularly *not knowing quite when something was finished because you never knew when someone would come and stick something else on the wall*. Storer had engaged Cathy Wren to have overall vision for the piece but she needed insight into what was happening during the devising process to be able to make final decisions. For Carree and his team this meant that they were responding 'on the hoof' to artistic decisions

that he felt could have been made earlier. Storor, however, did respond to requests from the production team and some elements were *tied down*, they still had to be very reactive so come the night before opening eight people *had to storm the set because that was the day we'd decided what colours the doors were going to be*. Carree points out that Storor himself was part of this final push to get things finished in time for the first performance:

he worked setting up the mother's room, helping to set the toys in the washing room - we'd paint and he'd clear up. We were stretched but he took us on a positive journey.

Now that he understands his process, in any future partnership with Storor within a theatre setting, Carree would like to persuade him to work in a slightly different way in order to *preserve the sanity of those who work around him*. There were times, for example, when the performers came into the first performance and the set was much different to the tech and dress rehearsals, when Carree thought that maybe everything had reached the edge of reason. Producer Anna Ledgard, on the other hand, notes that Storor's approach to devising a performance that evolves from a participatory practice *requires extreme flexibility from an institution and that the fine details of production plans fall into place close to performance and this can be scary*.

For the Best producer Anna Ledgard also notes that the relationship with the production team went well and that the occasional tensions that arose, born out of the intensity of the process and the challenge of putting something on in a theatre and using non-theatre spaces as integral to the performance, were quickly resolved. According to Ledgard only one big issue arose which was to do with care of the set. For the Best was a site specific piece where audiences walked through the set and consequently *every detail was vital, so the aesthetic need to be very sharp which had implications for the time allocated for care of the set*. As soon as this was identified, however, it was dealt with immediately. Once the production of For the Best got underway Ledgard had desk space in the production offices which she considers was good strategically as it enabled her to *keep an ear to production issues and be at the centre of the evolution of the production*.

Adam Carree held the production budget at the Unicorn and although there some issues with cash transfer with Artsadmin Ledgard considers that the budget management

was excellent and that the project benefitted from Carree's experience in this area.

But despite the intensity of the process and the challenges that had to be resolved Carree feels positive about having worked on For the Best:

The team worked above and beyond what they normally do and there was never a complaint and that's what Mark can do - Mark can take us on that journey and make us feel as if it has been worth going on

Marketing

Anna Ledgard found the marketing department and the box office exemplary *with nothing too much trouble*. However, marketing For the Best did present the marketing department with challenges and they realised from the start that it would require a different approach. Elliot Rose noted that Storor and Ledgard had strong and clear ideas about how they would like the work to be represented and that they *didn't feel that our visual brand would fit in with the project*. It was suggested that two different images could be used, one children's theatre image and another one for more adult audiences but willing compromises took place and, in the end, the Unicorn presented the publicity in an adapted house style that was less playful, with *less doodles and images*.

Having to promote For the Best before it had been created *presented the marketing department with more challenges than the average marketing campaign*. From the outset the department took their lead from Storor in what they said about the work with the children at Evelina Hospital School. Rose had worked with devised performances before and knew that as the work progressed it would be possible to be more specific about the performance, which is what happened with For the Best.

Deciding the age group for which a performance is suitable has to be discussed before every new production opens at the Unicorn. On Storor and Ledgard's advice For the Best was publicised as being appropriate for age 6-7+ although other members of the department, according to Rose, thought that 8 or 9+ would be more suitable. The age of

suitability is the one area about which Rose expresses doubt in relation to the way For the Best was marketed. This doubt was sparked by the response from a teacher at Meridian school who withdrew from bringing children aged 6-8 to see the performance. The reservations she expressed about suitability are expressed elsewhere in this document but Rose concedes the school had a point. The show, he says *was darker than we'd expected which sounds silly given the subject matter. Maybe we should have said 'are you sure that it's suitable for children of that age?'*

Overall there was a challenge in terms of sales at the start of the run and in trying to accommodate Ledgard's request that every performance had a mix of both adults and children:

they wanted to design by hand for each show and I was concerned with selling tickets.

These went slowly at first but through word of mouth and good reviews audiences grew and ticket sales exceeded the targets set.

Working on For the Best took the marketing team *out of their comfort zone* but, in Rose's view, this added to the skills of the department. Despite the uncertainty about how to talk to the public about the performance before it had been created; the discussions about images for the publicity and the complicated allocation of tickets Rose is very positive about the working relationship they established with Storor and Ledgard.:

The relationship never broke down, it was always friendly and because they were here all the time in the lead up it made it easier when making decisions

Front of House

Working on For the Best required a change of role for the ushers who were involved. Not all of the front of house staff were confident with the unfamiliarity of being more a part of the performance than is usually the case. According to Zulekia Scott *it was a challenge and to begin with there was a lot of negative feedback but once the ushers got used to it, it was OK. Having to wear the patient's robes in the*

corridor made them feel part of the show. However, there was an inconsistency of commitment to the role, with some of the staff never seeming to be at ease with the change in expectation that being on duty during *For the Best* entailed. This resulted, according to Anna Ledgard, in front of house staff being perceived as 'diffident' by some members of the audience. *In future projects with such sensitive content, Ledgard acknowledges, all involved in the theatre need to see the show in the first week.* This would enable a clearer insight into the performance which would be of particular benefit to the marketing department. It would also enable those front of house staff involved to understand their role more clearly. The question does arise, however, as to whether the expectation placed on the ushers was more than they were confident in doing because it gave a sense of performance to their job that is not present on other occasions.

Partnership with Artsadmin

Artsadmin took on the financial management of the project and provided administrative support for the Symposium. The financial management ran smoothly once the project was up and running although staff changes in the early stages slowed the process down. Finance contracting and administrative backup throughout the project were managed very effectively.

Artsadmin also provided marketing and mailing services, bringing new audiences to the Unicorn. The support and expertise of Artsadmin was very valuable when recruiting and auditioning staff and performers and in drawing up contracts with the Unicorn Theatre and freelance staff on the project.



17 RAISING AWARENESS OF RENAL ILLNESS

"It was going into that room and seeing that boy on dialysis – it helped me understand more about what it's like. "

Year 6 Boy Meridian School

In *For the Best* Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard set out to create a piece of theatre that would *raise awareness and understanding amongst children, their peers and a wider audience of issues related to living with renal illness*. At every stage in the project Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard sought advice and information regarding relevant biomedical science from those working in the field of renal health, ensuring that the project was underpinned by a sympathetic understanding of the area.

However, an understanding and awareness of renal illness requires more than knowledge of biomedical medical science. Children with renal illness are concerned with the metaphysical aspects of their condition as well as the physical experience of undergoing dialysis as Manuela Beste, Headteacher at Evelina Hospital School, points out. She recalls a child being concerned about blood transfusions and asking:

Am I still going to be me if I have someone else's kidney? If I have someone else's blood who am I if I am made of blood and bones and organs?

In his approach Storor works to bridge the distance that can exist between the lived experience of renal illness and biomedical clinical practice. Working through metaphor he enabled the children at Evelina to 'dig deep into their strengths as they navigate their illness, declaring who they are by virtue of how they face their disease.' (Charon

2008:96) The way in which the felt experience of illness and its physicality can intersect is present in the precise choice of image Child J makes in her poem, where her medical condition provides the metaphor for her declaration of who she is:

*...I am water
Limited water passes my lips but I am water.
Open, clear, crystal cold, a fountain of reflection
comes to those who gaze into me...*

The performance of *For the Best* drew on narrative knowledge rather than scientific proposition and illuminated the impact of living with renal illness on the whole family. In Helen Nicholson's view (Nicholson 2010 – in press) *the juxtaposition of technological space with domestic space within the performance served to remind the audience that there is another dimension and deeper emotional element to medical science.*

Whilst there is no doubt that the experience of the Haemo family was at the heart of the work, it was the nurse that drew the attention of children from Meridian School:

The children wanted to talk about the nurse and how she was too busy to spend time with the patient but was doing a good job. (Class Teacher)

It was the Nurse's presence that triggered the conversations the class had once they returned to school about dialysis, what kidneys do and what happens when they stop functioning. As one Y6 boy said:

It was going into that room and seeing that boy on dialysis – it helped me understand more about what it's like. All the people who ain't got that illness should be grateful.

As has already been discussed, the capacity for children to respond to *For the Best* when they come as a school group depends on the opportunity afforded them to discuss what they have seen as well as the experience they have as inferential readers. In the case of the children from Meridian School, the conversations that took place once back in the classroom revealed the biomedical science embedded in the performance.

18 DISSEMINATION

A series of 4 events were organised which gave an opportunity for deeper engagement with the making and performance of For the Best for a range of different audiences: students in school, further and higher education; professionals from the fields of arts, science and education; participants and partner organisations. These events were organised to meet the original objective of providing:

A high profile platform for debate and dialogue about social, ethical or cultural issues surrounding participatory and applied theatre processes in relation to arts and science learning

Masterclass 5th June 2009

A masterclass led by artist Mark Storor was attended by 16 young performers aged between 18 – 23 who were recruited by Artsadmin and the Unicorn. In the workshop Storor introduced them to the starting points for the work in schools and hospitals by working on life sized self portraits and associative poetry on the theme of identity using the same approach as the work in Evelina Hospital School and the Out of Bounds workshops.

HRH Duchess of Cornwall Visit 11th June 2009

HRH Camilla the Duchess of Cornwall, who is a patron of the Unicorn Theatre, had asked to attend a performance of For the Best and this was perceived by some parents and staff as adding a special status to the work. It certainly raised the profile of the performance and was probably significant in bringing executive officers from the Evelina Children's Hospital, The Greater London Association and the Wellcome Trust to For the Best. A small reception was organised to accompany her visit so that she could meet participating children from the primary schools, and representatives from the partner schools and organisations. Participating children in both hospital and primary schools were excited by the attention of a royal visitor and expressed pride in having met and spoken to her. Two of the parents from the renal unit came to meet the Duchess, although the children from the Dialysis school were not able to attend due to the timing of the visit during their medical procedures. Considerable care had been taken by Unicorn Development team to ensure that the Duchess saw an entire performance, rather than an extract, as was originally requested by the palace.

London Arts in Health Forum after show talk 11th June 2009

Damian Hebron of the London Arts in Health Forum chaired an after show discussion for an audience of 40 at the Unicorn Theatre. This involved Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard in discussion with Polly Moseley arts in health worker and dialysis patient. The discussion focused particularly on the relationship of For the Best with the hospital and questions were asked about its impact on the nurses and medical staff, two of whom were present. With emotion, one of the nurses revealed how the performance had made her reconsider the behaviour of a particular child. Through his poetry, she now understood that his obsession with tearing tissue was very important to him, and was to do with his failing eyesight and a need for the tactile experience tearing paper provided. Until that point his behaviour had been a source of albeit understandable frustration

for nursing staff because it distracted them from their key tasks:

He loved the feel of tissue paper between his fingers; the softness. He loved the crackling sound of tissue tearing in his ears.

The nurses also felt that the portrayal of medical staff and nurses could have been perceived as negative, with the needs of the child secondary to the multiple demands of the technology of renal care. This view was debated and an alternative view was presented that the particular scene between Milo and Nurse celebrated the way the nurses managed the multiplicity of demands on their time, both human and mechanical.

Symposium at City Hall 24th June 2009

The Symposium was organised collaboratively by Artsadmin, the Unicorn Theatre and Producer Anna Ledgard. Delegates attended For the Best followed by lunch and the Symposium. The Symposium was attended by a total of 90 people (see appendix). The venue was the Mayor's Living Room at City Hall which was provided free of charge by the Greater London Authority. The venue is walking distance from the Unicorn Theatre and its location and impressive panoramic views and facilities provided a prestigious setting for the event.

The Symposium aimed to shed light on how For the Best was made and to enable an audience of bio-medical, arts and education professionals to explore together some of the issues raised by the project in relation to ethics, pedagogy of participation and links to bio-medical science. Richard Wingate of the Wellcome Trust Panel agreed to act as Chair for the event and a panel representing each of the partner organisations - Worple Primary School, Evelina Hospital School, Charles Dickens School, Unicorn Theatre - made short presentations before a discussion was opened to the delegates. A wide ranging discussion took place addressing the following questions.

What did teachers learn from For the Best?

Presentations from key staff in the schools endorsed the depth and care of the design and delivery of the residency project in school.
Reflecting real life experience

The Headteacher of the hospital school mentioned the power of the translation of the children's experiences into theatre form where *"the princess you depicted is our daily experience in hospital"* yet it was done in a way that everyone could bring their own experience to it. The performance and its process made use of 'metaphorical teaching' to give children a voice to express real life experience.

Enduring Legacy

The Headteacher used the image of skimming stones as a metaphor for the partnership with the hospital school. *"You picked up each stone very, very carefully, it was nurtured with great care. This is going to ripple long after this project. We're not going to lose what we've gained."*

Enhanced Resilience

The Headteacher described 'enhanced resilience' as one of the key outcomes for the individual children who had worked with Mark. *"you helped....(child)hold her head higher, and built her resilience to be in hospital"*. She also noted how one child, who had only recently arrived in the UK, was now blossoming as a poet and understood how it gave him a way of expressing his experience.

Contrasting demands: creativity/curriculum delivery

Teachers from both of the primary schools involved in the project acknowledged the rich learning that occurred from immersion in an open ended creative process, one which does not naturally align itself to the way schools are organised. Each school, in different ways, described how at the outset of the project they had no idea where the project would go. Their decisions to become involved therefore rested in trust of Mark and Anna and the Unicorn Theatre, and in the way the project communicated very clear learning objectives. However, as soon as work began in the classroom teachers acknowledged the quality of what was happening as a class teacher at Charles Dickens commented:

"No one knew what they were doing at the beginning...then I saw some

of the most powerful work I have ever encountered in my career...this is what we should be doing in schools” .

Another Deputy Head described this sense of chaos of creativity:

“we’ve been turned upside down and inside out and we’ve learned so much”

All of the teachers present acknowledged the value of work which engaged children as well as teachers at a deep and personal level, commenting on how they have been enriched both personally and professionally.

Professional development through multi-agency working

The Headteacher of the hospital school commented that *in any circumstances communication is difficult in a hospital school* but she considered that the project’s strong emphasis on multi-agency working meant that communication is clearer between the hospital departments and the hospital school. – even to the extent of tables in the school kitchen being *‘covered with muffins pierced with hatpins’* when Mark Storor was working with the children’s parents. This clearer communication is also reflected in both teachers and nurses attending the performance as part of their professional development and evidence of a change in perspective for one particular nurse.

Was the performance suitable for children?

The question of age appropriateness of the performance was raised. Not surprisingly from the particular audience present at the Symposium there tended to be agreement that, with the right kind of preparation, children should not be protected from tough subject matter. The difference between attending as a child with a parent or as a member of a class of children with teachers was acknowledged. The Headteacher of the hospital school took a decision not to bring children who were not, in her view, emotionally resilient and a parent expressed the view that:

The absolute ferocity of the presence of possible death is terrifying for a parent, perhaps too it is too close for the

child who has really experienced illness, too close to reality.

Another parent, however, whose child has a life threatening condition, regretted that she had not brought her to see For the Best and wished she had as *she needs to tell her story.*

Many delegates considered that children were able to accept complex theatre at their own level of understanding with *each child enter(ing) with their own imagination, uniquely and in their own way and reading into it at their own level and will take what they want.* There was also acknowledgement that children and adults experience things very differently but the question of how adults should deal with emotions evoked by the performance was as relevant as questions about the support for young audiences. An adult, who is herself on dialysis three times a week, pointed out that adults need this emotional honesty as much as children *as adults often don't express emotions as much as they could. This could offer life long learning for adults too.*

Storor expressed a conviction that the theatre form enables children to understand the very difficult subjects, including the prospect of facing death. Tony Graham, the artistic director of the Unicorn, said that honesty within the theatre experience was of central importance:

Children won't forgive you for dishonesty in the theatre and a lot of theatre (for children) is not honest enough.

The final word went to a 15 year old student who had been involved in For the Best:

They did a good job. My work is for children to show that there is a glimmer of hope, no matter what you fight, you have to never give up and stay until the end

What are the ethical issues and dilemmas raised by working with very sick children?

Interestingly whilst this question was posed within the symposium, there was no direct discussion on this subject. This can in part be explained by the wholehearted endorsement of the process and outcome by

professionals with responsibility for children as well as the children themselves. Storor's description of working with the children gave insight into his strongly held inclusive values and attention to what the children were contributing:

It's about trying to stay true to what the children are giving.....I recognise the authenticity of one child's experience to give to another. In realising (through the metaphor of theatre) the idea of the child, his ideas can be valued.

For the Best had a combination of strongly held, values driven methodology and close and responsive partnerships with professional teachers and carers which were key factors in ensuring the emotional welfare of participants. This reduced ethical concerns and dilemmas and provided a supportive structure for discussing any concerns that might have arisen.

This is not to suggest, however, that there is no room for further discussion about the nature of the complex ethical considerations that need to be addressed when embarking on work that centres on personal experience.

What was the relationship with Bio-medical Science?

It was acknowledged that the direct communication of scientific knowledge was not the focus of this work. However For the Best very successfully communicated important messages about what it is to live with a chronic renal condition and the effect on families of living with such conditions. A senior NHS renal consultant made the point that there was great value in the 'metaphor' of performance providing an ethical window for public engagement with bio-medical matters.

What were the responses of medical professionals?

Medical professionals reflected that some of the nurses had said

that the performance made them realise that at times they were distanced from their patients and hadn't realised the significance of patients' behaviour. However, the view was also expressed that in order to do a very difficult job, at times you have to keep a distance, because otherwise you could not go on. This point also reflects the observations made by medical staff from the renal unit who expressed concern at the way the portrayal of the Nurse in *For the Best* might lead audiences to view them as being unresponsive to the emotional needs of the child. An NHS renal consultant present at the Symposium suggested that there was a danger of people being marked by what they don't do and *being seen to fail when you do not respond emotionally to the circumstances*. One of the strengths, he pointed out, of medical staff working in such settings is that they have the ability not to respond emotionally when doing so *would prevent you doing your core job well*.

Conclusion

In evaluating the day it was concluded that the Symposium's attempt to meet multiple objectives - celebration, providing information, debate - for multiple audiences - participants, bio-medical, health, education and arts and cultural professionals - within the 3.5 hour timeframe was ambitious. Although it may not have enabled deep engagement with any one area, it did, however, provide a rich forum for a wide ranging discussion amongst professionals who do not often get such opportunities.

Organisational Issues

An organising committee met four times between October – June 09 to plan the Symposium and Artsadmin undertook the administrative support for the event. The Symposium involved a greater than anticipated workload for Artsadmin. The event roles and responsibilities were not distinctly defined and the workload fell mainly to Producer and Artsadmin administrator. It was clear that there was significant public interest in attending the Symposium as demand for places exceeded the capacity of the event. In future, greater investment in the dissemination strategy and events would enable the employment of a dedicated events and discussions curator and administrator with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

19 UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

For the Best presented creative challenges in all phases of the project but the prior experience of working on equally demanding projects and the diligence and care with which they prepared enabled Mark Storor and Anna Ledgard to work professionally at all times and in all situations. In developing such work further the following points have been identified by Anna Ledgard.

One practical aspect of organisation recognised by Anna Ledgard as needing a revised approach in future projects is the attention multiple platforms for dissemination require. Each element needs careful curation and in Ledgard's view would be best managed as separate entities alongside the project.

When working with children who are chronically ill, as was the case in For the Best, careful attention is needed to the duty of care that is ethically and professionally essential for all participants: families, children, carers, teachers and artists. During a complex project that extended over a long period of time it is extremely important that both time and expertise are available and counselling and dedicated training for those who are involved may be advisable.

Working with multiple partners is complex and the partnerships need to be nurtured carefully. The specific roles of each partner need to be well defined and a check made that each of the partners is bringing something to the partnership that could not be achieved by one of the partners acting alone.

When working closely with patients and families experiencing or living with chronic illness the responsibilities of artists and educationalists can extend beyond the scope of the project. The intimate and beautiful work created by the children who were involved in *For the Best* at Evelina Hospital School and which inspired the performance was later part of the very different context of family bereavement. At the request of the families the songs and poetry from *For the Best* were part of the funeral celebrations of the lives of two young children whose ideas and experiences had been at the heart of *For the Best*.

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