

Evaluation of Talking Tales and Moving Matters Residency Projects

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Foreword

This evaluation was undertaken by Cara Blaisdell and Sarah Morton from the **Centre for Research on Families and Relationships** based at the University of Edinburgh.

About the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR)

CRFR produces and stimulates high quality research and commentary on families and relationships and disseminates such work widely. It is a consortium research centre, whose main office is at the University of Edinburgh, with partners at the Universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian, Stirling and the UHI Millennium Institute.

CRFR aims to:

- Produce high quality, collaborative, inclusive, research relevant to key issues in families and relationships
- Enhance infrastructure to conduct research on families and relationships
- Act as a focal point in Scotland for all those with an interest in research on families and relationships including researchers, policy makers and practitioners
- Consolidate and strengthen links and networks across the academic research and the policy and practitioner communities, and between researchers and higher education institutions throughout Scotland
- Make research more accessible for use by academics, policy makers and practitioners

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Introduction

Starcatchers

Starcatchers is a pioneering organisation in Scotland that utilises the transformational power of the arts to support our youngest children aged 0-5 and their parents, carers and Early Years educators.

As a young, dynamic organisation, Starcatchers strives to put the needs of babies, toddlers and young children at the core of everything we do, while engaging with the parents, carers, families, early years' professionals and communities who nurture them. Building on the legacy of our internationally recognised previous work and body of research, this mission is delivered through an innovative, in-depth programme of cross art-form, artist-led activity that is supported and informed by research and evaluation.

Starcatchers delivers a three stranded programme of activity that includes:

- Producing and touring high quality performances and creative experiences to arts venues, community spaces and childcare settings across Scotland
- Community engagement projects that facilitate consistent contact between artists and very young children, their parents, carers and Early Years educators
- Creative Skills Programme to build confidence, understanding and capacity in Early Years practitioners in using arts and creativity in their daily practice with children and families



The Residency Projects

This evaluation report deals with two artist-in-residence projects that took place in formal early learning and childcare settings:

Moving Matters



Creative movement artist Skye Reynolds led a five-month residency project that explored the impact of consistent creative movement sessions on young children, parents and staff. The residency took place at Hillend Children's Centre in Greenock, an integrated setting that offers early learning and childcare for children aged two to six years old, as well as placements for children with Additional Support Needs from birth to aged three.

Skye Reynolds is a dance artist, performance maker and educator with over 20 years experience working in professional and community arts settings. Her work is experimental and collaborative with a focus on movement, spoken word and theatre. She is currently studying Infant Developmental Movement Education, and has recently created a new solo performance 'PITCH'.

Talking Tales



Storyteller Andy Cannon led a six-month residency project that looked at playful ways to explore language and support language development using stories and storytelling. The project took place in two nursery settings in Dundee: Dens Road Nursery and St Pius Nursery. At both settings, Andy worked specifically with the two year old groups.

Andy Cannon is one of Scotland's leading storytellers and was a founder of Wee Stories Theatre where he created productions including Labyrinth, Treasure Island and Arthur, Story of a King. Andy has worked as Artist in Residence at Platform, Glasgow and also with Macrobert, Stirling. Andy was the Creative Director of Performance for the Glasgow 2014 opening ceremony.

Creative Skills Programme

Starcatchers' Creative Skills programme aims to put arts and creativity at the heart of Early Years practice in Scotland. At Hillend Children's Centre, eleven members of staff have participated in the training during 2015/16, with two having taken part in previous years. Several members of staff from St Pius and Dens Road nurseries have also participated in the training.

The training adopts and promotes an engaging, playful, open-ended and child-centred approach. Theoretical sessions focusing on the importance of arts and creativity to Early Years and its place within, and links to, key policies. These sessions are delivered by Starcatchers' Creative Skills staff. Practical sessions focusing on a range of art forms (creative movement, drama, music, puppetry, storytelling and visual art) are delivered by Creative Skills artists with extensive experience in working with children in their early years. The programme is for everyone working across the Early Years sector, including staff in nursery and family centre settings, health workers, childminders, and out-of-school and play workers.



Approach to Evaluation

Research and evaluation have been integral to Starcatchers' work, helping the organisation to understand the impact of arts and creativity in the early years. The evaluation of the Talking Tales and Moving Matters residency projects was carried out by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships at the University of Edinburgh, in order to provide an element of external scrutiny.

This evaluation used a contribution analysis approach. Contribution analysis provides a clear picture of a project's aims and the evidence needed to assess progress toward those aims. CA helps to highlight all stages of project work, rather than focussing purely on the end result. More information about Contribution Analysis and how it was used for this evaluation can be found in the Methods Appendix at the end of this report.

Results Chain

From CRFR, an external consultant (Dr. Sarah Morton) and research fellow (Cara Blaisdell) worked with Starcatchers to help establish an overall framework for evaluating the Talking Tales and Moving Matters residency projects. The framework was expressed visually, in the form of a results chain showing how each stage of the project linked to the next.

		Risks/Assumptions (to get to next step)
Contribution (Final Outcomes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artists : Inspired by the process seed new ideas for future development/projects Very young children and children with a range of additional support needs show increased confidence and wellbeing through ongoing engagement with TT/MM 	
Practice / Policy / Behaviour (Intermediate Outcomes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artists develop new approaches to working collaboratively with very young children and their parents/carers Children who participate in Talking Tales contribute to playful storytelling experiences (in both active and quieter ways) Children who participate in Moving Matters show increased engagement and connection as a result of creative movement activity Practitioners in settings embed a wide range of creative approaches to supporting children's play in daily practice 	<p>Assumptions The learning and practice changes from the residencies will be sustained after residencies concluded.</p> <p>Practitioners have access to CPD and other training on creative play approaches to support their ongoing learning.</p> <p>Risks Variable access to CPD and/or staff turnover means that support for practitioners learning is patchy</p>
Capacity: Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills (Intermediate Outcomes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artists have an increased understanding about working with very young children and children with a range of additional support needs - their needs and capabilities - in a formal setting. Artists learn about the language and practices of the formal settings, and how creative play can fit into formal early learning and childcare environments. Children learn about the projects and new creative ways of playing. Children's capabilities, knowledge and skills are recognised and supported by artists and practitioners in a child-led manner. Practitioners have increased understanding of how to use storytelling/dance/movement in regular play activities with children. 	<p>Assumptions The project expands on understandings about what children's participation in creative play looks like.</p> <p>Practitioners are confident about offering playful, creative approaches with children and families in their practice outside of sessions led by artists</p> <p>Risks Children's participation is limited to 'traditional' models (sitting still for a story etc.)</p> <p>Practitioners, for reasons detailed previously, are not confident/engaged/interested in exploring creative approaches outside of artist-led sessions, or do not have the support to do so.</p>

Awareness/Reactions (Intermediate Outcomes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artists are open to participant needs and capabilities and are supported by Starcatchers staff to adapt plans accordingly Children engage with the activities and respond positively to the project. Children feel their participation is being recognised and taken on board in shaping the residencies (through informal and/or informal means) Practitioners are open and excited about participating in the project. Practitioners feel they can share their views and interests to inform the development of the residencies. 	Risks/Assumptions (to get to next step) Assumptions Children and practitioners feel 'co-ownership' of the residencies and help shape the projects over time. Practitioners have the capacity, time, confidence, space and support to engage collaboratively with artists. Practitioners are interested in learning about creative approaches. Risks Children and practitioners feel the projects are being done 'to' them rather than 'with' them and disengage Practitioners are limited in their capacity, time, confidence, space and support, or are not particularly interested and therefore do not engage, or engage minimally, or in non-collaborative ways.
Engagement/Involvement How will children, parents/carers and practitioners be engaged?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artists commit to working collaboratively with the practitioners, children and parents/carers on the development of the residencies Artists will work in inclusive ways, particularly with children with additional support needs and very young children Artists and Starcatchers staff have clear communication and regular updates to support the development of the project. Starcatchers staff offer appropriate support and attend sessions regularly Artists document the process through their own journal/documentation and through writing a blog on the Starcatchers website which is shared by Starcatchers and partners Partners (setting/Local Authorities) commit to supporting the development of the project and support participants to access the project 	Assumptions This is a process that Starcatchers has delivered a number of times previously so assumptions are that the relationships/development/delivery of the framework of the project will be straightforward Partners (setting/Local Authorities) are interested in the project Strong collaborative relationships will develop between artists and practitioners because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners will have time available to engage and collaborate with artists Staffing will be stable, allowing for continuity in developing the residency. Risks Poor communication between artists, Starcatchers and partners Partners are not interested in engaging with the project Artists find it difficult to work collaboratively with practitioners because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners' time is too stretched to engage meaningfully with artists There is high staff turnover and depth of engagement is lost
Activities/Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two 5 month action research projects that enable artists to explore playful, child-led activities in settings that use either language/storytelling or dance/movement as core components Artists will be in residence (ie. embedded, integrated, continuity) at their settings from September/October 2015 Andy will focus on developing storytelling with 2 year olds (Talking Tales) Skye will focus on creative movement with children 0-5 with a range of additional support needs (Moving Matters: Play, Create, Imagine) Artists document the process through their own journal/documentation and through writing a blog on the Starcatchers website which is shared by Starcatchers and partners 	
Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artists with expertise in creative play (storytelling and movement) Support from Starcatchers staff Partnerships with Hillend, St Pius and Dens Road Nursery Practitioners Local Authority Early Years Manager/ Q10 input Materials budget Scottish Government funding 	

Evaluation findings at a glance

	Project planned outcomes	Extent of achievement		
		Not	Partial	Full
Contribution (Final Outcomes)	Artists, inspired by the process seed new ideas for future development/projects			X
	Very young children and children with a range of additional support needs show increased confidence and wellbeing through ongoing engagement with TT/MM			X
	Practitioners foster an ongoing 'culture of creativity' at the settings		Practitioners engaged in ongoing work to overcome barriers	
Practice/Policy/Behaviour (Intermediate Outcomes)	Arist develop new approaches to working collaboratively with very young children and their parents/carers			X
	Children who participate in Talking Tales contribute to playful storytelling experiences (in both active and quieter ways)			X
	Children who participate in Moving Matters show increased engagement and connection as a result of creative movement activity			X
	Practitioners in setting embed a wide range of creative approaches to supporting children's play into daily practice		Many successes, but also barriers to embedding	
Capacity: Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills (Intermediate Outcomes)	Artists have an increased understanding about working with very young children and children with a range of additional support needs--their needs and capabilities--in a formal setting.			X
	Artists learn about the language and practices of the formal settings, and how creative play can fit into formal early learning and childcare environments.			X
	Children learn about the projects and new, creative ways of playing.			X
	Children's capabilities, knowledge and skills are recognised and supported by artists and practitioners in a child-led manner.			X
	Practitioners have increased understanding of how to use storytelling/dance/movement in regular play activities with children.			X
Awareness/Reactions (Immediate Outcomes)	Artists are open to participant needs and capabilities and are supported by Starcatchers staff to adapt plans accordingly			X
	Children engage with the activities and respond positively to the project. Children feel their participation is being recognised and taken on board in shaping the residencies (through informal and/or informal means)			X
	Practitioners are open and excited about participating in the project. Practitioners feel they can share their views and interests to inform the development of the residencies		Some practitioners recommended an 'entry meeting' during which shared goals could be established	
Engagement/Involvement (Immediate Outcomes)	Artists commit to working collaboratively with the practitioners, children and parents/carers on the development of the residencies			X
	Artists will work in inclusive ways, particularly with children with additional support needs and very young children			X
	Artists and Starcatchers staff have clear communication and regular updates to support the development of the project.			X
	Starcatchers staff offer appropriate support and attend sessions regularly			X
	Artists document the process through their own journal/documentation and through writing a blog on the Starcatchers website which is shared by Starcatchers and partners			X

Evaluation findings at a glance

Activities/ Outputs	Two 5-month action research projects that enable artists to explore playful, child-led activities in settings that use either language/storytelling or dance/movement as core components.			X
	Artists will be in residence (i.e. embedded, integrated, continuity) at their settings from September/October 2015.			X
	Andy will focus on developing storytelling with 2 year olds who are eligible for the provision of early learning and childcare (Talking Tales)			X
	Skye will focus on creative movement with children 0-5 with a range of additional support needs (Moving Matters: Play, Create, Imagine)			X
	Artists document the process through their own journal/documentation and through writing a blog on the Starcatchers website which is shared by Starcatchers and partners			X
Inputs	Artists with expertise in creative play (storytelling and movement)			X
	Support from Starcatchers staff			X
	Partnerships with Hillend, St Pius & Dens Road Nursery practitioners			X
	Local Authority Early Years Manager/QIO input			X
	Materials budget			X
	Scottish Government funding			X

- **As a result of the residencies, practitioners had an increased understanding of how to use storytelling/dance/movement in their regular play activities with children.** They built confidence and found ways to embed creative approaches—though they also experienced barriers, particularly around time and planning. Practitioners were pushed outside their comfort zones, but most also felt fulfilled and satisfied by the process of learning about creative approaches.
- **During the residencies, children showed increased confidence through ongoing engagement with the projects.** Over time, practitioners noticed that children's social interactions had increased, and that children were exploring a broader scope of language and communication as well as becoming more comfortable with physical movement.
- **The creative approaches were inclusive for very young children and children with a range of additional support needs.** Practitioners felt that children were “thriving” when given the time to play and explore their social and emotional skills “without any pressure on them.”
- **The artists developed new approaches to working collaboratively with young children in a formal setting.** Their own creative practices were challenged, especially when working with children who were very young (2 years old) and children with a range of additional support needs. Both artists said that the residencies had pushed them to reflect on their work and their personal development as artists.
- **Support from managers was very important to developing creative approaches.** Staff needed to feel comfortable experimenting with new ideas, supported when things didn't quite work out as planned, and encouraged to keep trying. Conversely, if managers were too controlling—particularly about messiness and keeping to a rigid daily schedule—creative approaches could be shut down.
- **In both residencies, practitioners felt there were significant barriers to embedding creative approaches and fostering a ‘culture of creativity’.** Finding time to plan was one barrier. Another was finding spaces that could accommodate creative work. A third barrier was staffing, particularly when staff:child ratios were high. Some practitioners felt that creative work was being pre-empted by caring duties, such as nappy changing or toileting.
- **There was strong evidence about the benefits of pairing the residencies with the Creative Skills Training.** Practitioners who had done the training felt more confident about experimenting with creative approaches in the workplace, and said that the residencies helped develop and support their learning. The benefits of the combination of training and residency were especially evident at Hillend, where most of the practitioners (including the manager) had undergone the Creative Skills Training—creating a whole-centre, supportive ethos of learning about creative approaches.

The Residencies

In summer 2015, Starcatchers secured funding from the Scottish Government to deliver a series of activities that had a focus around the Play and Early Years agendas. The Talking Tales and Moving Matters residencies had been proposed as key part of this programme of activity, as a means of demonstrating the impact and potential of consistent contact between artists and very young children within a childcare setting environment.

Choosing the Nurseries and Information on Communities

The settings involved in the residencies were selected in different ways.

Moving Matters

Starcatchers had established a relationship with Hillend Children's Centre after some of the staff had participated in the Creative Skills Programme, and plans were made for 11 more staff to participate in the 15/16 programme. As part of the training, Skye Reynolds had led sessions on creative movement and had also delivered a 'Play Day' at Hillend, supporting staff to implement their training with children, other staff and parents.

This was a particularly successful day and both the staff from the setting and Skye were interested in exploring further working that would allow more regular contact and increased creative movement activity within the centre.

Talking Tales

The approach with Talking Tales was slightly different. Starcatchers had an established relationship with storyteller Andy Cannon who had been involved in the delivery of the Creative Skills Programme and who has extensive experience as an artist making work for children in Scotland. Through discussions with Andy, he had expressed interest in exploring approaches to storytelling in nursery contexts. Andy had delivered 'Play Days' as part of the Creative Skills Programme previously and a number of observations from this work had informed the work he wanted to focus on through the Talking Tales residency.

Starcatchers had identified Dundee as an area that was keen to develop further working in. Starcatchers had formed a strong relationship with the Early Years Team within the Local Authority and there was a mutual desire to explore deeper creative working, going beyond delivery of the Creative Skills Programme.

Through discussion with Lesley Gibb from the City Council, the nursery settings were identified. Dens' Road was selected as a setting that was adjusting to the recent intake of eligible two year olds. St Pius was a brand new setting that opened in October 2015 and it was suggested that Andy's residency could support the development of creative practice in this new setting.

In-depth Look: Moving Matters

Case Study: Hillend Children's Centre

At Hillend, Skye initially spent some time observing and getting to know the children and staff. Once she felt settled, she began to develop her creative movement work in a way that complemented the routines and rhythms of daily life at Hillend. Skye's approach was informed by Developmental Movement Patterns and 'contact improvisation', a technique from contemporary dance.

"together with the practitioners, we would all get down on the floor to roll, play, touch and move... letting the young ones climb and lean on us, making contact to explore gravity and balance through gentle shifts of weight.." **Artist interview**



Sometimes Skye led group sessions with the children and practitioners, and at other times she integrated creative movement more fluidly into the children's free play:



"We had some lovely sessions which were about joining the children in their free play and making provocations.

Action begins to happen and you can see what they're doing—bring in parachutes, soft balls, music—the children start to re-build the nursery. They would often get out cardboard boxes and we'd make pathways, tunnels and build little villages."

Artist interview

Some children at Hillend had autism and others used assistive devices such as wheelchairs and splints. With these children in particular, Skye explored tactile ways to facilitate their movement and non-verbal communication using gentle touch and contact. Her kinaesthetic work with these children included rolling with Pilates balls, supported crawling, rolling on the floor and massage.

At Hillend, nearly all of the practitioners had taken part in the Starcatchers Creative Skills Training—including the manager of the setting. Because the manager had done the training, the others felt supported to experiment with creative approaches. Without manager support, they said, *"it would be more difficult to change practice"* because the manager might think *"you are just playing up"*.



The practitioners said that having Skye's residency running alongside the Creative Skills training really supported their learning:

"I felt I got more from watching her rather than just doing training with adults."

"You were doing it along with her."

"The two running side by side really helped."

Quotes from practitioner focus group

Having Skye at the nursery particularly helped the practitioners develop their confidence about trying out creative movement with the children. For many practitioners, creative movement was outside their comfort zone and even challenged them physically. However, practitioners also said that feeling uncomfortable was important because it helped them think more deeply about their practice. Feeling out of their comfort zone also helped practitioners reflect about whether children themselves might feel uncomfortable during creative sessions.

Key Benefits of Moving Matters:

- Children developed confidence about joining in with the movement sessions and became very excited when they saw Skye. The playful movement sessions seemed to inspire children to interact more, expand their play, and vocalize more. This was particularly the case for children who did not communicate primarily by using speech.
- Practitioners learned that movement could be embedded in “wee ways” throughout the day—for example, incorporating movement during story time, massage, or using gym balls with the children.
- Practitioners were inspired to think reflectively about children’s experiences. They now work in different ways, particularly with children who have additional support needs. Practitioners particularly noted the benefits of non-verbal communication and touch for the children and for themselves.
- Learning about creative movement pushed practitioners out of their comfort zone, but over time they developed more confidence about working in creative ways. Practitioners said that Skye’s presence “lifted their spirits” and that the creative movement sessions were “fulfilling and satisfying”.

Key Challenges of Moving Matters:

- It was difficult to keep the creative approach going once Skye had left, because there was not much time to plan. The nursery has now nominated a creativity practitioner in each playroom, which will hopefully make it easier to coordinate, plan, and sustain creative approaches over time.
- Following on from this, another challenge was practitioners’ own evolving comfort levels with creative movement, particularly improvisational approaches.
- Practitioners sometimes felt unsure about how to support creative movement with children who had physical disabilities. Practitioners worried about “doing it wrong” and inadvertently hurting the children.
- Some learning programmes used at the nursery were quite structured and hard to adapt for creative approaches. Practitioners felt that sometimes children were being interrupted and taken away from their play to do these more structured activities.



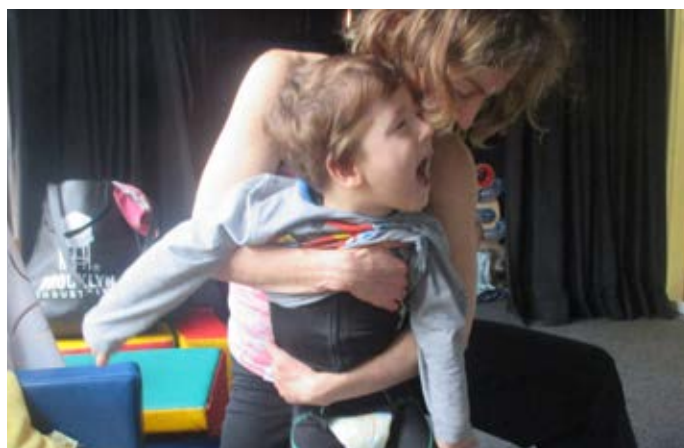
Spotlight on Movement: Using Somatic Movement Approaches with Max

As part of Skye's ongoing development as a movement artist and dancer, she has been studying Somatic Movement and Infant Developmental Movement Education with Body-Mind Centering. On her project blog, Skye wrote about how her ongoing training informed her work at Hillend:

Taking courses on 'Senses and Perception', 'Ontogenetic Development', 'Basic Neurocellular Patterns' and 'Primitive Reflexes, Righting Reactions and Equilibrium Responses'—supported by Starcatchers—reinforced Skye's long-standing approach to creative movement, which focuses on embodied experiences. Sensory experiences, such as touch, were particularly important for informing how Skye worked with the children at Hillend.

Skye described how the Developmental Movement principles helped her make connections with Max, who had complex learning and developmental needs:

"I think the way I worked with Max was of interest to the nursery staff, and to also to his mother who came in to see what we were doing. Whenever I was in the nursery, Max and I would spend some time together. We'd get him out of his chair and down on the floor, it was hands-on, I was facilitating his movement with my own body in a way that the practitioners perhaps didn't have the experience or comfort to do." **Artist interview**



Indeed, some practitioners were cautious about using Skye's movement techniques with the children who had particularly complex medical needs. Practitioners expressed that they were nervous about doing something wrong and hurting the children. Skye, in contrast, was confident about her ability to connect with Max and to respond to his movements in ways that were safe for him:

"I was working simply and intuitively using embodied information from developmental movement principles. Max was out of his chair, that's one thing. He was often in contact with my body, that's another thing. In this way I was able to support and facilitate some of his physical choices because I could feel where his body was wanting to go. Max's carer often gave me positive feedback, saying 'Max is doing things we haven't seen him do, he really enjoys working with you.'" **Artist interview**

Skye thought that developmental movement/somatic movement training for practitioners would be of great benefit, for both practitioners and children. Over time, practitioners at Hillend said that Skye's approach helped them become more attuned to children's non-verbal communication:

"Some of [the children] don't have the language to tell you what they want, but their body movements are telling you, and you're seeing those signs as well." **Practitioner focus group**

Practitioners said that using movement and touch to communicate with children was very powerful. Non-verbal communication created a different kind of connection and way of engaging, "using very subtle movements and smiles and things". Practitioners felt that being more attuned to non-verbal communication helped them connect with the children in new ways.

For more on connecting with young children through movement and touch, visit Skye's project blog at <https://movingmatterssite.wordpress.com/>

In-depth Look: Talking Tales

Case Study: Dens Road and St. Pius Nurseries

Andy's residency began with a period of observation, so that he could get to know the children and practitioners at the nurseries:

"It was really important to develop my relationships [with practitioners]... to really get to know the nurseries, having no expectations the first four or five weeks, just getting embedded and joining in." **Artist interview**



"Over the next few weeks I've set myself the challenge to create a framework/routine for storytelling that can be as sympathetic as possible to the child-led ethos of the nurseries. With a book an individual child can approach a teacher or parent and request that it can be read/shared with them so the question I'm asking myself is: Is it possible for oral storytelling to be equally as accessible (and dispensable) as a book? And if so – how?" **Artist blog post**

For practitioners, Andy's ways of engaging with the children were very different from "old fashioned ways", as one practitioner put it. His approach was far less structured than practitioners were used to, and he used unconventional ways of attracting the children's attention—like gargling water:

"When [Andy] gargled water, they were flocking [to him]...so that was your audience without having it be too structured, like 'you're going to go with Andy for a story', or 'come over boys and girls and sit down'...it was a new way of gathering them over." **Practitioner focus group**

At first, practitioners were bemused by Andy's approach—as one practitioner said, "we were like, what's going on here, because the noises were so random!" They were soon converted when they realized that the noises and other non-verbal ways of communicating captured the children's interest.

Practitioners also liked the ways that Andy would allow the children to leave the story and come back in, without this movement disrupting the storytelling.

"Just trying to engage them with tone of voice, or an object...something that draws them back in without stopping the group or stopping the story to say 'come back over'." **Practitioner focus group**



"I learned that younger children can listen in many ways, they do not have to 'sit and listen,' they can move with the story—actions, movements and sounds." **Practitioner questionnaire**

Practitioners did face barriers to embedding creative approaches. The early learning and childcare provision for two year olds was fairly new at both settings when Andy arrived for his residency. This meant that not only Andy, but also the practitioners at the settings, were learning about working with two year olds. In one setting, a practitioner felt that care routines, such as nappy changing or toileting, made it difficult to plan and carry out creative sessions.

Despite the barriers that both settings faced to embedding creative storytelling approaches, both settings also saw benefits for the children and for their own professional growth. As practitioners became more relaxed about how they managed storytelling sessions, the children began to explore vocabulary and to take on an active role in shaping the stories. Practitioners felt more open to using their imaginations and inviting the children to do the same. Some practitioners had done the Starcatchers Creative Skills training, which helped them feel more confident about storytelling:

"We do the storytelling at snack and my team members' creative experience has had a great impact. She started drama with 'Little Miss Muffet' where the 2 year olds act out the rhyme, the children fully engage and it seems to build their confidence."

"Creative approaches are something I've always felt give the individual children confidence as it's open and there's no right or wrong way." **Practitioner questionnaires**

Practitioners especially felt that repetition was important, so that children (and practitioners) were familiar with a story. Familiarity with different stories also helped them feel confident about improvising and being “more free”, as one practitioner put it. Being more free about storytelling meant that practitioners used their imaginations and enabled children to do the same. Very young children could shape the story in their own ways when adults created the conditions for them to do so, and welcomed children’s contributions.

Key Benefits of Talking Tales:

- Children became increasingly involved with storytelling during the residency. They contributed to the direction of the stories being told and incorporated their own props into improvised storytelling. Many children’s speech developed significantly during the residency. It was difficult to know how much of this expansion could be attributed to the residency, but involving children in storytelling certainly supported language development.
- Practitioners learned that storytelling goes beyond books, becoming more open to oral storytelling as well as experimenting with pictures, blank pages, and movement as prompts for storytelling.
- Practitioners felt more free with the children, allowing them to wander and come back and engaging with children in different types of ways. This was a shift from “old fashioned” thinking about storytelling as a time for children to sit and listen.
- Practitioners developed their confidence to use their own imagination to tell stories, and include the children in creating stories together. Being spontaneous about storytelling enabled the children to join in and shape the stories, supporting their explorations of language.

Key Challenges of Talking Tales:

- Finding spaces where children and adults could concentrate and engage with each other during storytelling was a challenge. The playrooms could be loud and distracting, making it difficult to create deep engagement.
- Staffing was identified as an issue in both settings, where practitioners felt they were stretched thin—meaning it was difficult to find time to plan and prepare for storytelling experiences.
- Practitioners needed to find ways to embed creative storytelling into their daily routines in ways that were appropriate and accessible for two year olds. Many practitioners noted that they spent a lot of time on care routines, such as nappies and toileting, which they felt interfered with learning experiences.
- It was not easy for some practitioners to build up the confidence to ‘perform’ in front of other adults, particularly the more dramatic elements of storytelling—for example, whimsical sounds, dramatic facial expressions, movements. However, some practitioners did feel confident about storytelling and greatly enjoyed the process of developing their own creative practice.

Spotlight on storytelling: The Comfort Zone

For Andy, one of the trickiest part of his residency was convincing the practitioners that it was ok to go outside their comfort zone, becoming freer and more dramatic in their storytelling. He brought this up during one of the practitioner focus groups:

- Andy: *But I think it would be really good to have some sort of workshop where we really chat about, 'Why do I feel embarrassed when I'm doing this.' You know...even now without children, you're talking about [approaches to reading a book with children]. And I can feel it myself, that I could easily go...Happy face! Sad face! [makes faces, everyone laughs] and that's what I do.*
- Practitioner: *I can't sit here and do that face in front of you.*
- Andy: *What is it? This is what I'm fascinated by.*
- Practitioner: *I've got a red face just thinking about it. I don't know what it is.*
- Andy: *We all have it in different scales...when I'm rehearsing by myself I get really self-conscious.*

At this point in the conversation, another practitioner suggested that adults needed to “learn to be silly” in order to connect with the younger children.

- Andy: *But that is one thing I'd like to unpack. Is that being silly, or is that how a two year-old communicates. So you're actually speaking to a two year-old. You're not being silly...*
- Practitioner: *I suppose it's like when you're speaking to a baby, you just change your voice automatically.*
- Andy: *You adjust and if your friends eavesdrop on you...*
- Practitioner: *They're not judging you though, babies, are they?*

During his residency, Andy felt that the top-down and hierarchical nature of formal educational settings was sometimes a barrier for practitioners' learning about creativity. He also wondered whether practitioners would benefit from support about working with two year-olds; the early learning and childcare provision for eligible two's was fairly new. He noticed that some practitioners approached work with two year-olds as “keep them from hurting themselves” and seemed uncomfortable when he wanted to engage with the children more deeply and creatively.

“I think for me part of the bigger training for the staff and for ourselves, as well, should be these simple questions. Actually saying 'What does educating a two year-old look like? What does it mean to you? What do you think that looks like?’” **Artist interview**

For Andy, working with two year-olds became about how to promote an ethos of equality, collegiality and respect while still “being in the moment” with the young children.

For more on connecting with young children during creative storytelling, visit the Talking Tales project page at: <http://www.starcatchers.org.uk/engagement/talking-tales-andy-cannon/>.



Conclusion and Recommendations

The residency project met most of the planned outcomes fully. This evaluation has found that the projects were beneficial for the children, practitioners, and artists who participated. The evaluation has also identified some areas where changes could be made, to improve future residency projects. Recommendations include:

- An 'entry meeting' would be helpful at the beginning of the residency. During the entry meeting, the managers, practitioners, and artist could discuss the residency, define some shared goals, and make sure they were on the same page about what the residency would entail.
- Multiple methods of communication should be explored. It is rare to gather all practitioners in one place for a meeting, as time is stretched in early learning and childcare settings. Artists tend to be freelancers and may have many different projects going on at once. Alternative ways of ensuring that staff and artists can communicate about the residency could be explored, including email, for example.
- At the end of the residency, a planned handover time would support practitioners to take ownership of their learning and embed creative approaches. Artists suggested that, during this time, they could take a step back and play a mentorship role. This could help practitioners feel more comfortable with taking the lead on creative approaches, while still having the artist at the setting to offer support and discussion.
- Periodic visits from the artist after the residency would be helpful to keeping the creative approaches going. Both practitioners and artists suggested having ongoing contact.
- Artists could tailor their work to support practitioners to identify and work around barriers to embedding creative approaches. In order to do this, artists would need to make a point of periodically consulting with practitioners about perceived barriers, and approach these barriers as a specific focus of their residency.
- Following on from this, Starcatchers could provide training and support networks for artists about how to 'be in residency'. Both Skye and Andy noted that sensitivity was required in order to navigate the dynamics of the early years settings. The artists were embedded in the setting, but played a very different role from practitioners, which could sometimes cause tensions. For example, one artist allowed children to play on the furniture during creative sessions, which was not the usual practice in the nursery. This took some adjustment and considerable open-mindedness from practitioners, as well as work from the artist to establish different boundaries. Both artists also found that some working practices in the setting did not sit comfortably with their own approach to working with young children. Both Skye and Andy suggested that a specific connection to another artist who had done residency work would have been useful.
- Evaluation could be embedded from the beginning of the residencies. The discussions about the contribution analysis evaluation framework were seen as particularly fruitful in terms of identifying goals and clarifying what different stakeholders were expecting from the project.
- Evaluation can also help make an ongoing case for creative approaches in formal early learning and childcare settings. Practitioners in both the Moving Matters and Talking Tales projects learned that creativity requires being open to process and experimentation. However, practitioners noted that creativity as an outcome is difficult to measure, and that creative approaches may be hard to justify if a focus on measurable outcomes is too narrowly defined. Evaluation approaches that focus on processes as well as final outcomes, such as contribution analysis, could help practitioners justify using more creativity and playful explorations in their settings.
- Future evaluations should incorporate children's perspectives from the start. It is difficult for external researchers to understand young children's own perspectives on their experiences when there is only time for a few isolated visits. However, in future residencies, practitioners in early years settings could use a documentation approach—floor books, for example—to record observations and quotes from children about their experiences with residency projects. This would help draw out children's voices more clearly.

Methods Appendix

CRFR has developed a specialism in evaluation, including using contribution analysis, through the work of Dr. Sarah Morton, Co-Director for Knowledge Exchange. CRFR has supported organisations to build evaluation into their work, to help them reach their goals and demonstrate outcomes--rather than evaluation being a separate activity that is 'bolted on' at the end of a project (Morton 2015).

In a contribution analysis approach, evaluators collaborate with people working with a project to identify the outcomes that a service hopes to improve, and develop a 'theory of change' about how the service will bring about that improvement (Better Evaluation 2015). That is, what did the projects set out to achieve, and what steps are required to achieve those outcomes? What assumptions are being made at each step, and what risks do these assumptions create for the theory of change?

As the earlier section on 'Approach to Evaluation' discussed, these questions are represented visually in the form of a results chain. For the Moving Matters/Talking Tales evaluation, the first draft of the results chain was created by Starcatchers. The results chain was then used as a discussion framework during a collaborative meeting between Skye and Andy, Starcatchers, and CRFR. By the end of the meeting, a clarified results chain had been created that expressed shared goals, steps toward those goals, assumptions, and risks about the two residency projects.

The results chain was then used by CRFR researchers as a guiding framework for independent data collection. For example, the interview schedules for the artists were created based on assumptions and risks in the results chain—as were the topic guide for practitioner focus groups.

The evidence collected was reviewed against the results chains and a picture of the effectiveness of the programme against the results was built up. Where gaps were identified in the evidence, these were filled with further data collection.

Evaluation data

Sources of evaluation data	No. of participants
Interviews with artists	2
Focus groups with practitioners at Hillend and Dens Rd nurseries	20
Practitioner questionnaires at St. Pius nursery	7
Project blogs	2
Observation and informal discussions at Hillend	About 40: both children and practitioners

Engagement and involvement data was provided by the artists and settings. The interviews, focus groups and blogs were used to identify changes in awareness, knowledge and skills, and behaviours and practices. Observation was used to track children's reaction to the projects. Data were collated across the results chain and quotes were chosen that illustrated the key findings.

References

Better Evaluation (2015) Contribution Analysis [online] available from

http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/contribution_analysis

Morton, S. (2015) 'The Value of Evaluation' [online] available from

<http://crfrblog.blogspot.co.uk/2015/04/the-value-of-evaluation.html>

Further resources on contribution analysis

Contribution Analysis: An Approach to Exploring Cause and Effect ILAC Brief Number 16:

http://dmeforpeace.org/sites/default/files/0501_Contribution_Analysis_ILAC.pdf

Contribution Analysis: Resources (IRISS blog): <http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/contribution/>

Reflective Literature Review of Contribution Analysis: <http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/contribution/files/2015/06/Reflective-Literature-Review-of-Contribution-Analysis-Stocks-Rankin-2014.pdf>

Social science methods series guide 6: Contribution Analysis (The Scottish Government):

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/175356/0116687.pdf>