

Story Makers Festival 2019: Internal Evaluation

Data Collected

Data collection method	No. of participants	Breakdown of participants
Questionnaire	62	Children (21); Parents (18); Students (8); Artist Practitioners (10); Teachers (5)
Short interview	11	Children (5); Parents (3); Students (3)
Written reflection	12	Artist practitioners (12)

Our Festival Aims

1. Commission new arts interdisciplinary work
2. Reach new audiences
3. Provide professional development

Evaluation: 1. Commissioning new arts interdisciplinary work

Across 2 scoping workshops prior to the event, the artists explored key themes emerging from their workshop designs and the theme for the day which was Story rebels: A new type of hero. This culminated in the collaboration of a devised immersive performance opening, exploring role of the hero's journey. It was led by 2 artists who wrote and facilitated the event- all other 21 hub artists and 260 delegates were involved in a Lecture Theatre space (See attached artist plan). The performance was accompanied by a delegate's 'map' which mapped themes through the day and resulted in key thematic questions to explored (see attachment). Artists also had the opportunity to view each other's work during the day.

- 98% of questionnaire respondents felt that the Festival had impacted upon them in some way.
- For the children, the chance to work with each other and a range of artist practitioners meant that they were 'excited' and 'inspired' to write. Children felt that their voices were valued and this 'builds children's imaginations' as 'children could tell people what they know'. Two children said that the Festival had 'made me believe my dream'. Another child said that working with others had made 'learn that everyone has a different way of looking at the same thing'. The children who were involved in writing The Nightmare Catcher, which was launched at the Festival, were 'really proud' of themselves.
- Parents revelled in the opportunities to co-construct stories with their children and develop their own creativity. Four parents said that they 'loved' the way the children took 'ownership' of the activities, with one grandparent saying she 'didn't know how talented my grandson is' and one parent saying how 'everyone took part and listened to each other regardless of age'. Three parents said the Festival had given them the 'urge to write', with one saying 'it is the most fun I've had in ages ... I could have gone to every single workshop'.
- Artists and teachers valued both the impact they felt the day had upon the children and the chance to collaborate with each other. For one, the enjoyment and imagination of the children was 'an inspiring reminder of why the creative arts matters so much to children'. For others, their own practice had been transformed, both in terms of 'creative ideas' and the potential for research to 'develop' and 'articulate their practice'.

- The written reflections of the artists captured a variety of ways in which children in workshops were able to be spontaneously creative in response to often open stimuli. This included intergenerational work where parents and their children were interacting 'equally', 'making connections' in their 'emerging narrative'.
- The value of collaboration between artist practitioners was also evident in their workshop reflections: one school teacher talked about how 'everyone's input was welcomed and valued' at the planning events; one artist practitioner, who took a leading role in the conference opening, said that 'being able to narrow down the collaboration from a large collection of artists at the planning meeting ensured that the ideas were clear and bold.'

Evaluation: 2. Reach new audiences

The day successfully brought many more children than anticipated to the event. Through marketing on local radio stations 213 children and parents attended. We also provided 2 buses to bring children to the event from more socially deprived areas which included Beeston Leeds (30), Girdlington Bradford (25), and Armley (10). The programme offered 14 artist workshops for families and children. The open mic session at lunchtime offered a platform for children to share poetry and spoken word and reflect on their involvement in writing a book with Story Makers. Our youth group also performed to a professional audience. The final performance was from 2 South Asian young dancers.

- The majority of participants (72%) had not been to a Festival like this one before. This figure was highest for Parents (95%) and Children (91%).
- 100% of participants enjoyed the Festival.
- 100% of participants would recommend the Festival to people they know.
- Participants enjoyed the full range of activities on offer. This included:
 - The workshops where children felt 'inspired' and 'involved', with one girl saying 'I haven't been to a festival for young people like this before';
 - Parents and children appreciating the graduation ceremony for the children who co-authored *The Nightmare Catcher*;
 - A range of adult participants appreciating the opportunity to 'learn about the process from an academic point of view' in order to 'connect with what I do professionally';
 - All participants enjoying the creative opening which 'broke the ice' and allowed 'children to realise their voices and ideas were going to be valued';
 - A range of participants enjoying the Indian dancing and the BAME representation.

Evaluation: 3. Provide professional development

57 artist educators also attended (drama practitioners, creative writers' performers), and a professional booklet was designed to support networking. Through artist evaluations we have started to plan working papers with artists and a special edition of Story Makers Dialogues and the following hub programmes. The programme offered 6 professional artist workshops and offered the opportunity for new professional artist to network with experienced professionals. Leeds City Council/Child friendly Leeds also attended.

- 100% of Artist practitioners and Teachers felt the Festival had impacted positively upon them.
- The opportunity to both 'network' and 'develop my practice' by working collaboratively were cited by the majority as key benefits of planning and running the Festival.

- Artist practitioners particularly valued the Festival opening which provided an opportunity for collaboration in a creative and ‘disruptive’ way.
- Artist practitioner reflections upon workshops capture this professional development in more specific ways:
 - One teacher said that it was ‘absolutely fantastic’ to see other artist practitioners at work and that it had given him ‘many ideas and food for thought’;
 - Similarly two artist practitioners felt that they had benefitted from attending other workshops and ‘getting ideas’ for their own practice – ‘we want to do this all the time but rarely make time to do it!’

What we have learned from the project

Audience Reach: The positive uptake from children, families and community centres has demonstrated a real appetite for an event like this and confirmed the lack of spaces for out of school provisions in the arts. We have learned that we could expand our capacity to deliver another festival and would change key organisational aspects such as using a larger open mic space, breaking workshop sessions into 1hr slots so that participants could access more experiences and allowing for food provisions. The intergenerational aspect of the event was also successful, and we would develop this. Other organisations such as Tutti Frutti in Harehills, Leeds, have already contacted us requesting to be part of the event next year. The event was particularly successful in terms of reaching a diverse audience and this is reflected in the evaluation comments from delegates such as:

‘It’s no exaggeration to say I was moved to tears. I saw families from such diverse backgrounds, brought together by a passion for creative writing. Some of the children were literally jumping with joy during the creative activities that you had organised, and it honestly made my heart swell. I just think it was so well done, with the amazing dramatic performances given by the speakers and other organisers such as Michelle. I just kept thinking what an amazing day it was for all the children who were there, and how rare that sort of family-oriented event is to find. The value you placed on representation was admirable as well, and the event felt sincerely diverse and inclusive for absolutely everyone there. It’s a focus that so often feels tokenistic (or worse, gets overlooked entirely) in these sorts of the events. I really do think you demonstrated the full potential of the Arts Council - the work you are doing is so special, inspirational and essential.’

Artists’ Professional Development: The organisation and development of the festival have facilitated a meaningful space to bring together a strong network of artists, publishers, performers, writers who are all championing diversity and marginalised voices through story. The Story Makers reach has also been greatly developed due to the festival to include links with further artists, LCEPs and local authorities. They have contacted us to be part of the offer next year and expand the reach across the region. The offer allowed us to pay artist which added value to the work which is often missing and bring together a high calibre of artists this has strengthened partnership and collaboration. The event has also allowed us to develop collaborative artistic opportunities through the hub across 2 sessions. In reality, we need longer than this and we would apply for the festival again with a longer lead up allowing more collaboration time for artists.

In the questionnaire we asked participants to identify how the Festival could be improved:

- The most common response (48%) was that the Festival could not be improved;
- Other responses included:
 - Providing food;
 - Thinking about location: 'central Leeds easier to get to'; the 'open mic session was crowded'; 'the workshops were too far apart';
 - Allowing participants to attend more workshops by either 'lengthening the day' or 'running the event over 2 days';
 - Having less adult talk for some of the whole group sessions, particularly the ending.

In their written reflections, three of the artist practitioners discussed the difficulties of collaboration, which is something we will consider in the future:

- One said how 'collaboration is a really difficult thing' due to 'time' pressures but also the fact that some artists were not always 'clear on the purpose of the whole day';
- Another felt the theme could have 'run through the whole day' and that the professional strand could have been part of this;
- And another felt the ending could have been used more the 'pull people together on the hero's journey'.

The longer term impact of the project

Beyond the Festival, we have already begun to:

- Develop a national evidence-based artist educators award in line with our Story Makers research and also artist evaluations from the festival. This will support the acknowledgment and quality assurance of artists works in schools and communities. It will be aligned with our School of Mental Health award and be developed alongside artists in the hub.
- Plan to reapply for the funding 2020 so that we can develop the festival performance opportunities further to young people during the open mic and beyond to University pathways. Extend tour of artist work into monthly community centres for young people and families through next applications. Link to Holiday Hunger project.
- Develop our Youth Voice programme to work with local artist in Chapeltown, Armley and Seacroft.
- Include a wider reach of young people in our communities through our developed networks.
- Develop a more cohesive regional approach to delivering drama and creative writing opportunities to young diverse marginalised children. Meet with Leeds City Council and other organisations to discuss funding and collaborate next year on festival.
- Develop a stronger network of artists championing diversity through story.
- Facilitate stronger interdisciplinary artist collaborations and CPD.
- Support the development of marginalised stories through 3 further Story Makers Press books and author pathways.

- Disseminate festival outputs through blogs and other working papers to be shared with artists through Story Makers Dialogues and working papers

Artist practitioners and teachers also identified some of the ways in which the Festival will impact upon them in the future:

- One artist practitioner is going to continue to work with Story Makers Youth group;
- One artist practitioner is going to use some of the academic input to articulate and shape their practice further;
- One teacher is looking to develop partnerships with specific attendees in or provide training for teachers in his school relating to 'drama, phonics and early reading'.