

## **Evaluation Report 2016**

### **Early Years Project:**

Castleton, Quarry Mount, Little London and  
Shakespeare Children's Centres and Hovingham  
Primary School Nursery.



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**Sophie Alder, Aug 2016**

## **Introduction**

2016 was the seventh year of Northern Ballet's under 3's project which initially began as a pilot with Shepherd's Lane Children's Centre. This pilot project used the story *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen as a stimulus. The aim was to explore how dance could be introduced to under 3's through multisensory and movement activities and took place over a 5 week period of delivery. The success of this led to funding from Wades Charity who supported the project from 2011-15.

Between 2011 and 2014 we continued to work with the other Children's Centres in the Harehills/Chapelton cluster adding an additional centre each year. By 2014 the project had grown to 4 centres establishing relationships with Harehills, Chapel Allerton and Meanwood. A resource pack based on *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* was produced and it became apparent that the centres had their own aims and objectives in connection to the project. For example, some wanted to develop the relationship they had with parents and increase play and interaction between child and parent so invited them to join them sessions. Others wanted to focus on children with English as a Second Language (EAL) with the aim to develop their language and literacy skills. The age range also broadened up to age 5. This led to flexibility within the project to accommodate these varying needs and each centres project becoming more tailored.

2015 marked a shift in the project as a key aim was to find new centres to work with in other priority socially deprived areas of Leeds, as identified by Leeds City Council. Castleton and Quarry Mount joined the project and Shepherd's Lane continued working with us for a sixth year. The lack of staff confidence in relation to dance activities had become apparent which prompted us to introduce a staff training element the project, which Quarry Mount took up. They also chose to help develop a new story *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak and a subsequent resource pack was produced. Shepherd's Lane wanted to work with Asian families who all had English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Castleton prioritised their sessional 2 year olds, the majority of whom are Free Early Education (2FEE) funded.

## **2016**

This year we reached our target of 5 centres; Castleton and Quarry Mount returned to the project and Little London, Shakespeare and Hovingham Primary School Nursery joined. Due to the success of the previous year's staff training at Quarry Mount this was an element of the project that was encouraged and included by all to some extent. Quarry Mount and Little London both had full staff training sessions (3 hours) while the other settings had shorter trainings with the staff who were to be directly involved. All centres chose *We're going on a Bear Hunt* apart from Castleton who used *Where the Wild Things Are*. Unfortunately this year we were unable to invite the centres to our studios as there was no studio space available during the period of delivery. However, as each centre receives a contribution towards expenses this meant they could spend the whole amount on resources.



This project fulfils **Northern Ballet's Learning Business Plan 2016/17 objective:**

**2. Deliver quality, sustainable arts programmes in partnership with education providers in association with Cape UK.**

(ii). Narrative Dance for the Under Fives – working with Children's Centres in deprived wards of Leeds delivering movement workshops for under fives and their families.

**Arts Council England's (ACE) seven quality principles.**

This project fulfils all seven of ACE's quality principles:

1. Striving for excellence
2. Emphasising authenticity
3. Being inspired and engaged
4. Ensuring a positive child-centre experience
5. Actively involving children and young people
6. Providing a sense of personal progression
7. Developing a sense of ownership and belonging

I will highlight these throughout the report as **(1)**, **(2)** etc.

## **Overall aims of the project:**

- To introduce the under three's children to dance.
- To provide structured sessions in Early Years settings within which children can respond to music, storytelling and multisensory experiences.
- To find new centres to work with.

## **Centres involved:**

Quarry Mount (LS6 2JP), Castleton (LS12 1JZ), Little London (LS7 1SR), Shakespeare (LS9 7HP) and Hovingham Primary School Nursery (LS8 3QY)

**Time scale:** Feb – June 2016

## **Description of groups involved**

### Castleton

The group consisted of 12 two year olds in our 'Ladybird Room' , as a core group, 'topped up' with occasional visits from other children, to make up numbers when children were absent.

- Of the two year olds, all were eligible for 2FEEE funding.
- The group consisted of 3 BME and EAL children and 9 non-BME/ non-EAL children,
- The group gender balance was 8 boys and 4 girls.
- The group included 2 children cared for under Special Guardianship/ Looked-after.
- No children were classed as SEN, although 11/ 12 children started at our centre significantly below Age-related expectations (approx 12 months+ below), for all areas.
- For this room, 90% of the room this year made expected or better progress across all Prime areas, with 90% making good/ better progress for all strands of Communication and Language, and Health and self-care.

The centre is physically located in an inner city, residential area, which is in the highest 4% social deprivation. Many children accessing child-care come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, including the blocks of flats next to the school, without access to safe, outdoor spaces. The majority of children begin their Child care and education, operating at least 1 year below age-related expectations, including delayed communication, physical, social and emotional development. (Information on context from Castleton's Self Evaluation form).

### Quarry Mount

The group consisted of 8 children aged 3 – 4 yrs:

- 1 with SEN

### Little London

The group consisted of 12 children aged 2 – 4yrs. Two parents were also involved in the sessions.

### Shakespeare

The group consisted of 12 children all aged 2 years and in receipt of 2FEE funding.

#### Hovingham Primary School Nursery

The group consisted of 12 children:

- 9 children were EAL ( English as an Additional Language)
- 2 children were Nursery pupil premium (financially disadvantaged families)
- 2 children were from our most vulnerable group at Hovingham - 'White British' girls
- 1 child LAC (looked after child)
- 2 children were Somali, 1 Gypsy Roma, 1 Afgani, 1 Kurdish, 3 British and 4 Mirpuri Pakistani

## Structure

As the project has developed the sessions have become longer and this year often ran to 1hr 15mins. Many sessions had the potential to continue beyond this as the children were still involved in the activities. This may be due to the activities becoming increasingly child-led within the session structure **(3, 4)**.

*Even though the sessions are structured I found that it was still child led and we went with however they were reacting to each experience. For example, when it was the deep cold river week, Myla got stuck in tights off and really just enveloped herself in the freedom of the sensory experience. So things ran over a little but to see the enjoyment that all the children were getting it was not a problem. (Heather, staff lead at Quarry Mount).*

While this was viewed positively, it was noted that some of the older boys at one centre struggled with being in one room for such a long time.

Even though the groups of children directly involved were small it was agreed that involving more became problematic due to the nature of the sessions. Some expressed that they would have liked more sessions.

## Staff training

The staff training sessions were adapted for each centre. Only two centres, Little London and Quarry Mount, had a full staff training (3 hrs) which formed part of one of their staff training days. The other centres struggled to release staff, instead opting for a shorter session with two or three staff members who would be directly involved in the delivery. However, feedback from all the staff training sessions was very positive.

The trainings were viewed as “really useful” (Caroline, teacher at Castleton). The staff enjoyed them, found them inspiring and felt equipped with lots of new ideas to try as part of the project or as independent activities **(1, 3, 6)**. One member staff used the session to refer back to when leading her own *Bear Hunt* sessions, along with the resource pack.

Elements that were viewed as useful included:

- Practical activities - enabled staff to experience the activities.
- Linking practical to theory – analysing/discussing the activities provided a refresher for staff on the learning that takes place when children take part in such activities, movement play, child development and well-being.
- Examples from other centres outcomes and groups of children.
- Looking at resource pack, explaining sessions and the exact breakdown of how it would work.
- Bringing the whole staff team together/experiencing as a team – useful for planning, sharing ideas and was fun!
- New ideas that can be used with other children and as independent activities.





### **Impact of project on staff**

In terms of staff development this year's project seems to have been the most successful to date. The greater emphasis on staff training has helped increase confidence and resulted in staff leading their own sessions with other groups of children and even training other members of staff in the approach **(1, 6, 7)**:

*This personally has allowed me to feel more confident in teaching dance to the children and I use the warm up session and calm down session on a daily basis in the setting... We are now going to repeat the sessions with new children and each train another member of staff to do the dance too. (Staff at Hovingham Primary School Nursery)*

*For me this project was fantastic. It has helped my personal growth and confidence and I have no problem in leading the bear hunt sessions myself. (Heather, staff lead at Quarry Mount).*

It has also increased staff's understanding of a child-led approach **(4, 6)**:

*For me personally, this project has been a stepping stone in my own learning and career growth. It has made me see first-hand how important movement and sensory play is with the little ones, and how important it is to let them do something freely. In all sessions the enjoyment without restraints was lovely to observe. (Heather, staff lead at Quarry Mount).*

Centres expressed that staff throughout the setting engaged with the project, being "really onboard preparing resources" (Caroline, teacher at Castleton) and additional activities connected to it:

*The rest of the team have embraced The Bear Hunt in the play space with displays/a papier mache bear to put names in at snack time/story props in the book area and lots of other bear stories to read. (Heather, staff lead at Quarry Mount).*

The combination of these factors enabled the project to have a much wider impact. Staff are also keen to continue delivering dance activity having seen then the “positive impact it has on the children’s confidence, turn taking and language skills” (staff at Hovingham Primary).

## **Resources**

This year the resources sourced by each centre were even more varied than in previous years. Those cited as particularly successful were:

- Snow storm – flour and silver strips

*The snow storm week was fantastic. We had the flour for sensory experience and we were all covered in it. There was tissue paper snow strips and then the bag of silver strips that covered the entire room for the children to literally dive in and throw in the air like snow. (Heather, staff lead, Quarry Mount). **(2, 5)***

- Water
- Wooden construction blocks/planks

Centres used many materials they already had such as tissue paper, felt and fabric which were used throughout the project and enabled the children to create their own versions of grass, snow, forest etc **(2, 5, 7)**. Some made the resources with the children which became part of the learning experience.

Castleton chose to use *Where the Wild Things Are* this year and found it more difficult to resource than Bear Hunt as they purchased face paints, dressing up clothes and props. However, they also stated that not all these purchases were necessary. Clearly the staff’s ability to source suitable, and cheap/free, resources has a significant impact on the outcomes of the session so updating the resource pack with new suggestions taken from this year’s project is important.





## Content

Feedback regarding the content of the sessions was all positive. The children engaged well and became involved in the activities displaying high levels well-being **(3, 5)**:

*Children had lots of fun and really tried hard with all the new physical challenges. (Staff at Hovingham Primary).*

The sessions sometimes sparked an interest that the children continued to follow and a cyclical effect developed between well-being and involvement:

*Children enjoyed the week involving water the most and continued to access water and request water activities. As confidence rose over the weeks children became more involved and able to access the activities thoroughly. (Staff at Hovingham Primary).*

Staff liked the different sections/structure and commented that elements such as the warm up and instruments could be used on their own.

## Visits to Northern Ballet studios

In previous years a highly valued element of the project has been a visit to our studios with week four of the project held here, as well as a final celebration for all centres involved. Unfortunately this year it was not possible as there was no studio space available. The situation was exacerbated by having to wait for studio schedules to be released before I could give the centres a definite response. While they were understanding of the situation, there was disappointment from all.

Castleton commented that:

*All the children enjoyed the classes but would have preferred a visit to Northern Ballet and last year the children got a great deal from the visit with their families.  
(Caroline, Teacher)*

In previous years this visit has marked a turning point for many children and has enabled family members to be involved, which again has been a valuable aspect of the project. This is reflected by Caroline's comment "*Could do with greater involvement of families*" so is clearly an element that needs to be re-instated (if possible) next year.

## **Documentation**

Documentation was produced by staff and the children throughout the project in a variety of ways. This was used to contribute towards the children's learning profiles, as a way of sharing what the children have been doing with parents and developing skills. These included:

- Photos and observation for individual pupil profiles. These informed planning and assessment and targets set if appropriate.
- Photo shared on school website.
- Children drew their own pictures about the experience.
- Written observations by nursery apprentice.
- Book made from photos taken of the sessions so that the children "can read it and recognize their friends *Going on a bear hunt*." (Heather, staff lead at Quarry Mount).
- Photos used to make a book to use for future dance projects as a pre teaching tool.
- Displays in the welcome area with photos, pictures from the story and linking the sessions to planning, and the EYFS
- Photo album to share with the children and parents, including the story, photos, pictures and text from the story, linking the sessions to planning, and the EYFS

These examples demonstrate that the centres are integrating the project into their provision and placing value on it.



### **Impact of the project on the children**

*Out of all our 2 year olds, in each of our 3 room, the Ladybirds' room children made the most progress this year, and I am sure that the work with Northern Ballet this year had a significant impact on this progress and would love to work with them again next year. (Caroline, Teacher at Castleton)*

The project was viewed to have a positive impact on a wide range of areas. The areas centre staff identified included:

- Self esteem
- Concentration
- Ability to follow instructions
- Listening skills
- Turn taking
- Learning names of body parts
- Improving body confidence
- Different uses for outdoor play
- Playing in a different environment with new adults

Perhaps the most significant gains were made in these areas:

#### Confidence

*There has been a significant impact on confidence, particularly children with EAL. These children often find it hard to 'join in' activities with their peers, finding it difficult to communicate. This project has no limitations on communication as it*

*is all physical, sensory and emotional learning. This also supports their social development. (Samantha, Shakespeare Centre Manager)*

*Was really surprised with some of our more vulnerable children and how their confidence grew over the weeks. (Caroline, Teacher at Castleton)*

### Language skills

*Children have also developed their language skills increasing vocabulary using words related to the story e.g. splash, splish, swish and swash. (Samantha, Shakespeare Centre Manager)*

*Melissa told me she loves how the children have captured the story in their heads and how they meet a lot of EYFS goals outside of the sessions. For example, Alana who is 3 can re tell the whole story beginning to end without missing a word out. This has given Alana the confidence to re tell other stories she has been read. (Heather, Quarry Mount).*

The child-led approach enabled the children to develop skills that a more directed method wouldn't have:

*Children being able to use their own ideas and take play in different directions, developing imaginative play and leadership skills. (Caroline, Teacher at Castleton). **(4, 7)***

Case studies from Quarry Mount reflect this and suggest it empowered the children to take the lead:

*L & N were in all the sessions and as friends outside the session it was lovely to see them bonding more. They took each other's lead and really came out of their shells. When it was Snow Storm week and we were ready for the relax part of the session both girls began to lay out the fabric ready for their friends to lie under. (Heather, staff lead).*

Inspired them to continue exploring ideas outside of the sessions:

*K loved the forest section and she is really active when jumping off the stepping stones to reach the leaves from the ceiling. She even re enacted this in our own garden jumping off the tree stump to reach the leaves. (Heather, staff lead).*

### And raised well-being:

*In the Northern Ballet sessions M was not present for them all and in some he was very timid and shy, however he always loved the warm up and really got involved. By the last session his well being was very high and was lovely to see how well he has come on. (Heather, staff lead).*

*In the Northern Ballet sessions M (SEN child) embraced the sessions so much that he now takes his shoes and socks off all the time! It was really heart warming to see him enjoy the sessions and the routine of it. He liked the relax session and he usually liked to come to one of the adults for a cuddle. (Heather staff lead).*





### **Impact on the centres**

All centres viewed the project as having a positive impact that extended beyond the group of children and staff directly involved. All centres used the stories as a basis for the term's planning across the setting allowing staff to repeat activities with other children, continue exploring resources and ideas sparked by the sessions and react to the children's interests (4, 5):

*Very positive impact on the whole centre. Having a theme throughout was a great way to follow the children's interest in Bear Hunt and to keep the talking/language going. (Heather, staff lead at Quarry Mount).*

At Quarry Mount in particular the other children were intrigued by the project and often stood at the door watching and joining in the warm up at a distance. This interest continued outside with children not involved role playing and imagining the bear was in the bushes. Children who had participated the previous year remembered the project vividly, were upset they couldn't do it again and at times tried to sneak into the room. This demonstrates the significant impact the project had on them as they had only been 2-3yrs when they participated.

For Shakespeare the project enabled a link with the primary school the centre is to be dissolved into:

*Staff in the primary school observed one session and have introduced the project to their 3 and 4 yr. olds. They have adapted it to fit their needs and to be appropriate for their children. Three members of our staff team who are moving to another Centre in July intend to use their learning and activities from the project in their new setting. (Samantha, Centre Manager).*

This suggests a legacy will continue after the project which spreads much wider than the staff and children who were directly involved. This is very encouraging and demonstrates the value professionals who have observed and been directly involved place on it **(1)**.

## Unexpected Outcomes

Centres reported additional outcomes connected to the children's development that were unexpected. Shakespeare found that "Children who are of a shy and quiet demeanour have become loud and confident with vigorous movements" (Samantha, Centre Manager). They also saw "increased access to the willow tunnel in the outdoor play area with children exploring bending, hiding, jumping and using their senses to investigate and challenge their boundaries." This demonstrates a positive impact on the children's confidence in relation to their physical skills and their drive to continue exploring and developing these outside of the project. This is significant not only in regard to health and fitness, but also their brain/cognitive development as movement is an essential component of this.

A slightly negative outcome was shown towards the story *Where the Wild Things Are* used by Castleton. Caroline (teacher) commented that "I thought the children and staff would have found the story more exciting and inspiring. The staff who didn't access the training were less positive than those who did. All staff preferred the planning, activities and story last year." The story was not known by the centre staff and they found it more difficult to plan ongoing activity alongside the project than previously with *Bear Hunt*. This demonstrates not only the importance of the familiarity with source materials for staff but also the importance of the staff training session in generating enthusiasm and inspiration, which in turn impacts on the children's experience. They also reported that the children did not enjoy the book as they found it too difficult, which again may have been influenced by the staff's attitude towards the book. However, as the staff "loved the session" (Caroline, teacher at Castleton) this would suggest that *Wild Things* is more suited to 3+ yrs.



## **Future Recommendations**

The future recommendations received from the centres reflect their own aims for how the project might be developed in relation to their centre. These included:

- Use a larger space
- Different book, but continuing with funded 2 year olds
- Links with families
- Whole centre and Nursery project

Following this evaluation process I would recommend:

- Updating resource packs with more suggestions for resources and music
- As *Where the Wild Things Are* is a more challenging story recommend it for use only with ages 3+
- Re-examine the aims of the project as these have not changed since the pilot project.

### *Visit to Northern Ballet*

Perhaps the most significant recommendation though is to reinstate the visit to the Northern Ballet studios. Loosing this element highlighted its importance not only in terms of the children's development, but also in fulfilling the centres' aim of generating greater links between themselves and parents/carers. It also reflects and fulfils Northern Ballet's Learning Department's mission statement:

- Exciting and inspiring people about dance, through dance.
- We connect with new audiences to break down preconceptions about who can access high quality dance.
- We use creativity to educate and inform people about the arts, recognising everyone's individuality.

Ensuring studio bookings are requested several months in advance of the project (before centres have confirmed their delivery dates/times) may help to ensure this is element can be included. If studios are still not available during the delivery period, perhaps finding an opportunity for the children to visit after the project may be an option.

