



Evaluation Report
The Princess Who Couldn't Play
Primary Schools Tour: September 2012 – March 2013

The Company

Carry Franklin as Ambassador Lorraine de L'Isle
Kathryn Hanke as Princess Leonora

The Princess Who Couldn't Play is written and directed by Martin Riley
Education Resource Pack written by Andrew Wilkinson
Tour Management by John Mee

The figures

Between September 2012 and March 2013, *The Princess Who Couldn't Play* has been brought to a total of 21 Primary Schools across Leeds, York and Bradford. At each school we have worked with 2/3 classes of Year 1/2 children for two full days with a week's gap in between each visit.

Thanks to the very generous continued support of the Chartered Accountants Livery Fund (CALC), the Company has been able to deliver the project to ten new schools at a subsidised cost. These schools have been:

Fearnville Primary School, Bradford
St John's Primary School, Bradford
Harehills Primary School, Leeds
Hawthorn Wood Primary School, Leeds
Hugh Gaitskell Primary School, Leeds
Parklands Primary School, Leeds
St Theresa's Primary School, Leeds
Westwood Primary School, Middleton, Leeds
Hobmoor Primary School, York.
Lord Deramore's Primary School, York.

We also made return visits to the following schools who have been subsidised by CALC in previous years:

New Bewerley Primary School, Leeds
Beeston St Anthony's Primary School, Leeds
Calverley Parkside Primary School, Leeds
Holy Family Armley Primary School, Leeds
Meadowfield Primary School, Leeds
Middleton Primary School, Leeds
Middleton St Philip's Primary School, Leeds
Middleton St Mary's Primary School, Leeds
Rothwell St Mary's Primary School, Leeds

Wykebeck Primary School, Leeds

And lastly, we returned to Clapgate Primary School with whom we have a long-running relationship.

Visits to five of these schools were in addition kindly subsidised by the Leeds Community Foundation through the Leeds Schools Award. In addition, we are very grateful for the continued support of the Frances Muers Trust who support the costs of our business management and subsidise our work in schools.

During these visits, we have worked with 48 classes: a total of 1253 Year 1 and 2 children, (over 100 of whom are registered as having special needs) 52 teachers, over 100 teaching assistants and learning mentors, 7 student teachers and 2 intergenerational volunteers. The project has also enabled us to invite fellow arts workers and teaching professionals to see and reflect upon the work.

Evaluation

This evaluation has been compiled from reflective conversations with teachers and other members of staff at the end of each visit. We asked them three questions:

1. What do you think the children gained from our visit?
2. What do you think the staff gained from our visit?
3. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

The Findings

Engagement and Participation

The overwhelming initial responses from teachers when asked what the children gained from the project were on the theme of engagement. Teachers reflected on how strongly the piece had captured the children's imaginations; it had allowed them to encounter a story lived at life rate and in doing so, a door had been opened in their own interior worlds.

"It was a totally shared experience for them all. There is never normally 100% engagement. The children listened so actively and joined in. Like the acceptance of the wardrobe – they all saw it appear before their eyes full of dresses."

Mary McCormack, Year 1 Teacher, Lord Deramore's Primary School, York.

"I have never seen the whole class so eager to do something – and the boys as well! The children just absolutely loved it – they were so totally engaged from start to finish"

Jen Wolfe, Year One Teacher, Holy Family Armley Primary School.

"Our children don't have very rich experiences in their lives so they got so much from it. A live interactive story happening right here in their school – in which they became the heroes... priceless! "

Alex Clarke, Year 2 Teacher, Meadowfied Primary School.

“It was such a great stimulus to their imaginations – to be immersed for two whole weeks in



a world of magical islands, princesses and witches that was tangible and they totally believed in – such a fantastic antidote to their usual diet of computer games”

Dee McNamara, Year Two Teacher, St Theresa’s Primary School.

“The children’s imaginations have run wild”

Katie Mawson, Year 2 Teacher, Parklands Primary

“There has been a notable difference in particular children. For example, Raoul, he really struggled to use his imagination before – but he has bought into the story so much. He was captured by it, and has been inventing stories ever since.”

Debbie Meeson, Year 2 Teacher, Middleton St. Philip’s Primary School.

“One girl in our class who is an elective mute went home and made a puppet for the Princess. We have never seen her invest like that – it was very special.”

Lianne Haxwell, Year 2 Teacher, Westwood Primary School.

Inclusion

“Every child understood the whole story – even those with very little English.

The children felt incredibly safe in the situation – able to take part.”

Iain Tolmie, Year 2 Teacher, Harehills Primary School.

“The lower ability children have really benefitted from it. Often things get lost on them – but this was totally inclusive”

Andrew Smith, Year 2 Teacher, Meadowfield Primary School.

“We brought a small group from our Special Needs Class to take part in the project. I have never seen them sit and listen for so long or be so engaged. They all remembered every detail of the story – they lived and breathed it. This has never happened before.”

Katie Mawson, Year 2 Teacher, Parklands Primary School.

“Our SEN children were so alert and animated. They concentrated so hard and really understood the story and the problem. And they were able to remember it – these are children that normally appear to have no short- term memory at all. We realised that these children can do a lot more than we had thought previously. One child who normally has real behavioural difficulties – refuses to partake in anything, got up and chose a dress for the Princess. He was totally engaged.”

Amy Stocks, Year 1 Teacher, Clapgate Primary School.

Inspiring Writing

Within the project, the children are asked to write a letter to the Princess to persuade her to return to their school. Many teachers have also used the opportunity of the visit to inspire writing across of areas of the curriculum. Year 1 and 2 children are often still emerging as writers but teachers found that the project gave them such as strong context for writing that they were enthused to put pencil to paper. The vast majority of teachers commented that the quality of the children’s writing during this time was of a very high standard.

“Writing for a purpose has been fantastic”

Lianne Haxwell, Year 1 / 2 Teacher, Westwood Primary School

“When writing their letters, the purpose was so genuine and the children really thought about what they would say to persuade the Princess to come back.”

Fran Morland, Year 1 Teacher, Middleton St Philip’s Primary School

“The project gave children the inspiration and the motivation to write purposefully. So many of the children brought work in from home – they came in with letters they had written for the Princess. This had never happened before.”

Andrew Knight, Year 1 Teacher, St John’s Primary School.

“Every child independently sat and wrote an invitation to the Princess. The whole room was tapping away.. in fact, the show fed a full week of literacy work. We were writing instructions for how to keep Grimknickers away, instructions for playing games..it’s just been flowing”.

Iain Tolmie, Year 2 Teacher, Harehills Primary School.

“Ellis only usually writes for the intervention teacher but this week he has been working so hard in class – it has made a real difference. He wrote a whole story! He has never written before.”

Andrew Smith, Year 2 Teacher, Meadowfield Primary School.

“Patrick is a child you can never get to write – but he woke up and came alive with the writing. It has just ignited the boys’ enthusiasm for writing.”

Claire Duffy, Year 2 Teacher, Holy Family Primary School.

“Kasim cannot write at all and he has never wanted to – but he came and asked me: ‘is it a P for Princess?’”

Iain Tolmie, Harehills Primary School.

“There are say, 10 children in our year group. It doesn’t matter what we do, they just don’t join in. These children were hooked. They were able to verbalise things they had never said before – they were searching for the right words, wanting to write.”

Clare Duffy, Year 2 Teacher, Holy Family School, Armley, Leeds.

Developing Language

Teachers also observed how effective the project had been in developing essential speaking and listening skills. The most recent Consultation framework of the National Curriculum recognises how essential spoken language is for developing the foundations of children's learning:

'Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language, reading and writing as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject... Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects.'

"So much talking came out of this. Discussions lasted all week. One visit can fizzle out quickly but they knew that you were coming back. They were captivated and have not stopped talking about it all week."

Katy Lea, Year 2 Teacher, St John's Primary School, Bradford.

"All the children have talked about all week has been the Princes. They've explored all the possibilities of how to break the curse. It really helped to develop the children's story language. ..what if? ... what if?....and they have linked it to their learning in Traditional Tales."

Sarah Innes, Year 1 Teacher, Parklands Primary School.

"It has been a great opportunity for developing descriptive language"

Natalie Whaite, Year 1 Teacher, Hobmoor Primary School, York.

"Great to give the children the opportunity to be in role – develop their expressions and their language – this has been the very first acting experience for many of them."

Scott Donkin, Year One Teacher, Hobmoor Primary School.

"The children have talked about it non stop...in the playground, in the classroom, to their parents. They will remember this for life."

Fran Morland, Year 2 Teacher, Middleton St Philip's



Building Confidence

"It was fantastic for the children's confidence. The children who were invited to stand up and take part were often the ones who were normally quiet but they threw themselves into it and totally surprised us"

Natalie Whaite, Year 1 Teacher, Hobmoor Primary School.

“One child who never speaks in class actually spoke – he explained the rules to the Princess. He would never normally have this much confidence.”

Sarah Innes, Year 1 Teacher, Parkland Primary School, Leeds.

“Tia is such a quiet child normally but she came up and became Grimknickers – that was massive for her – a big leap of confidence”

Debbie Meeson, Year 2 Teachers, Middleton St Philip’s Primary School, Leeds.

“The children have really grown by doing this, and hopefully their confidence has stayed with them.”

Debbie Brown, Teaching Assistant, Clapgate Primary School, Leeds.

Developing social and emotional skills

“Initially our children were frightened by the idea of the witch and meeting the grumpy princess – but they stuck with it and it gave them real resilience.

They used a lot of social skills working together and working with children that they didn’t normally work with.

We spent a lot of time examining the idea of being grumpy and the children made an effort to understand what grumpiness was about. “

Sally Akass, Year 1 Teacher, Westwood Primary School, Leeds.

“The project really allowed the children to acknowledge their own behaviour. They saw the behaviour of the Princess and how she turned it around at the end. They will learn from that.”

Dee McNamara, Year 2 Teacher, St Theresa’s Primary School.

“It helped to link feelings to actions. We looked at why the princess stamped her feet or threw Silky... what was she feeling? This was a great model for the children understanding their own feelings.”

Katie Mawson, Year 2 Teacher, Parklands Primary School, Leeds.

“The children had to deal with a genuinely difficult situation. Things couldn’t be solved immediately. They wasn’t an instant pay off or an easy happy ending. On the first day when you left, they were left with a genuine concern – they really had to find the solution.”

Fran Morland, Year 1 Teacher, Middleton St Philips Primary School.

“Not getting there on the first day was really good for the children, it taught them not to give up.”

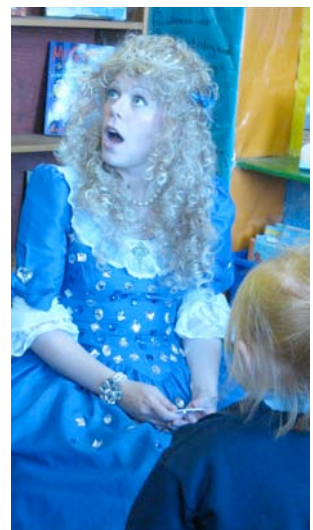
Anne Pye, Year 1 Teacher, Lord Deramore’s Primary School, York

“I felt like giving up – but I didn’t”

Caitlin , Year 2 pupil, Westwood Primary School.

“They have fixed it! Children with really troubled lives at home have become the heroes – and now they belong to Lyonesse – they are part of a community. The children will remember this for the rest of their lives. “

Debbie Meeson, Year 2 Teacher, Middleton St Philip’s Primary School.



“The social aspects of playing together in groups was fantastic. When the princess modelled being really grumpy and refusing to play, the children couldn’t believe it. They had a spoonful of their own medicine and then modelled being the ones that could play games.”
Mary Wright, Year 2 Teacher, Hugh Gaitskell Primary School.

“Ours is a very difficult cohort of children, so it was great to see our children working together as a real team.”
Dee McNamara, Year 2 Teacher, St Theresa’s Primary School.

“All the work about being friends and how to make the Princess welcome has really fed into our work about welcoming new children into the class – now we say they are just like the Princess!”
Sally Akass, Year 1 Teacher, Westwood Primary School.

Encouraging game playing

The project was first developed over 10 years ago to encourage children to play games again. With the recent rise of popularity in computer games and screen time, this seems more prescient than ever.

“It has brought about a revival in some of those old playground games. A victory in the battle against computer games and DSs.”
Katie Mawson, Year 2 Teacher, Parklands Primary School.

“The children have started playing games in the playground – it has led to much more independent play. Ours is a multicultural school so it was great to share games from other countries – to share traditions and realise how much cross-over there is.”
Anne Pye, Year 2 Teacher, Lord Deramore’s Primary School.

“It brought games back to the playground – we have been playing them all week.”
Moira Keirnan, Year 2 Teacher, Beeston St Anthony’s Primary School.

“They explored how it felt to be out in a game – they became the ones with the advice for the princess... she was on their side.”
Marie Colannino, Year 1 Teacher, Fearnville Primary School.

“They thought about how to play games – taking turns, being fair – they had to model it to the Princess. “
David Kiss, Year 2 Teacher, Rothwell St Mary’s Primary School.

Parental Involvement

We suggest to schools that the search for old-fashioned games is a wonderful opportunity to engage families and the wider community, especially the older generation. We also discovered that parents had become involved in the project more informally – infected by the excitement that the children brought home with them.

“There has been a lot of talking at home about games – lots of family discussion and oral sharing.”
Mary McCormack, Year 1 Teacher, Lord Deramore’s Primary School.

“The homework helped to involve the parents – they were suggesting the right game.”
Amanda Nicholson, Year 2 Teacher, Wykebeck Primary School.

“We had grandparents coming in to talk about games – it’s been great to use and value their knowledge.”
Amy Stocks, Year 1 Teacher, Clapgate Primary School.

*“The whole project promoted a lot of talk at home as well as at school
The parents got really involved. It allowed for a strong link between home and school.”*
Debbie Meeson, Year 2 Teacher, Middleton St Philip’s Primary School.

“The children talked about it so much – the parents started coming in asking about the Princess and hoping that she would be coming back.”
Dee McNamara, St Theresa’s Primary School.

“I’ve had Mums coming up to me in the playground at the end of the day saying, ‘What’s all this about a Princess – my child won’t stop going on about it.’”
Debbie Brown, Teaching Assistant, Clapgate Primary School.

Informing Teacher’s own practice

Staff reflected on how taking part in the project had impacted on their own teaching.

Responses included:

Inspiration to use drama more

“I always wondered before how much children can learn through drama, but now I realise that they can gain so much from it.”
Nicola Pinnell, Year 2 Teacher, Wykebeck Primary School.

“We need to try and add drama to the curriculum more – we realise now how much it engages the children. You don’t need props or scenery – it’s just about being a good storyteller.”
Sarah Innes, Year 1 Teacher, Parklands Primary School.

“The style of storytelling that you use really engaged the children. By using actions and building from the children’s ideas, they got inside the story and remembered every detail. I will try and be more flexible in my story telling – build in the children’s ideas.”
Lianne Haxwell, Year 1 Teacher, Westwood Primary School.

“It was fantastic for us and the children to see you tell stories without a book. Just with our hands and faces we made a story come to life. The way you built on the children’s ideas: accepted everything they said – never just moved on. A great reminder to us as teachers.”
Maira Keirnan, Year 2 Teacher, Beeston St. Anthony’s

Inspiring different approaches to teaching literacy

“We have a new curriculum for English which is designed to follow the children’s lead and be really creative. There were so many ways in which this project encouraged the children to write. It has begun to give me some new ideas of how to integrate this approach.”
Sally Akass, Year 1 Teacher, Westwood Primary School.

“It made me think that in the future I will make a real effort to make the writing real.”

Louise Jones, Year 2 Teacher, Fearnville Primary School.

“On Friday a consultant visited the school. One of the things she advised was a focus on purposeful writing. We noticed the purposefulness that came from your visit. We need to let go of the curriculum and hold onto the key skills.”

Katy Lea, Year 1 Teacher, St John's Primary School.

Inspiring more Cross-curricular working

“Looking at the children's writing you realise how much of a difference it made to link it to the project. It all began with a letter from the ambassador. I am thinking of simple things I can use to spark off creativity.”

Rachel Moody, Year 1 Teacher, Middleton St. Mary's Primary School.

“It has been so easy to turn into a four week unit. We tied in islands, instruction writing, in Maths we were weighing ingredients for baking, Traditional Tales, PSHE ... it gave us real opportunities for linking learning.”

Jen Wolfe, Year 1 Teacher, Holy Family Primary School.

“This is just the sort of teaching I love doing – when everything is linked – it allows for total immersion in the curriculum.”

Louise Jones, Year 2, Fearnville Primary School.

“We realised that if you get the right kind of topic, you can get so much out of it.”

Jeanette Ward, Year 2 Teacher, Middleton Primary School.

Encouragement to take more risks

“It encouraged me to take more risks as a teacher – we begin to play it very safe with our children, especially if a class has challenging behaviour. This made me realise how engaged they can be, even in a large group by something creative with a purpose and how well they respond to the kind of learning that doesn't involve pen to paper.”

Dee McNamara, Year 2 Teacher, St Theresa's Primary School.

“The results have proved to me that it is good to go off timetable – to take more risks.”

Alex Smith, Year 2 Teacher, Meadowfield Primary School.

Opportunity to observe children in a new context

“Being able to sit back and watch children from an objective viewpoint – there have been many surprises. Like Kasim – you couldn't hold back his ideas.”

Iain Tolmie, Year 2, Harehills Primary School.

“It was really nice to see the children enjoying something so much – being super engaged and so invested in something.”

Frances Sadatmandi, Year 2 Teacher, Rothwell St Mary's Primary School.

“A chance for us to observe children and see how they react in different situations.”

Hilary Hirst, Year 2 Teacher, Hawksworth Wood Primary School.

Enjoyment

“Being able to teach something you are genuinely excited about is fantastic!”

Maria Colannino, Year 1 Teacher, Fearnville Primary School.

“I enjoyed it as much as the children – I really got involved!”

Bronwen Kitson, Year 1 Teacher, Calverley Parkside Primary School.

The Company's Perspective

Even before we began the tour of *Princess*, the company anticipated that it would be a success. *Princess* has for a long time been a strong part of the Alive and Kicking stable. It was first created in response to the needs of a group of Primary teachers in Ilkley who felt that their children were no longer ‘playing’ in the playground but simply charging about, sitting on benches or kicking a football. They commissioned a piece of drama that would create a framework for teaching children playground games and encourage them to play again. And so *The Princess Who Couldn't Play* was born – and in true Alive and Kicking style, the children became the experts; the ones who know. And the learning that came from the piece went way beyond playground games.

The *Princess* has had many different incarnations, but for this tour, we settled upon the two days (with a week between each visit) formula. This has become tried and tested over the last three years with two of our other projects, *Gawain* and *Granny's Underground Garden*. We have discovered that the two day project strikes the perfect balance between the economic needs of the schools and the company's desire to develop a real relationship with the children.

This version was re-written by Martin Riley to include both *Ambassador* and *Princess* on both days. This allowed the company to employ Carry Franklin, long running company director and to develop our relationship with Kathryn Hanke who has now become a trusted and skilled member of the team.

Strategically, a retour of *The Princess Who Couldn't Play* has enabled us to bring our work to the younger group of Primary age children and their teachers and to develop new and strong relationships. The success of the tour has enabled us to already secure bookings for the coming year. We have also decided to develop a new show for Autumn 2013 as a sequel to the *Princess*. Having found the right children to break the curse on the *Princess*, the *Ambassador* now plans to return to the same with her new problem... coming soon!

As you will see from the comments, the tour has been an incredible success. Finally, we would like to thank all the teachers and teaching assistants that we have worked with over the tour for all of their incredible hard work and support, our trusty volunteer Peter Gray who has been at our side throughout the tour and won many children's hearts, the headteachers for continuing to believe in our work and to invest in it and to our sponsors for all of their invaluable support in making this tour possible.

Report written by Carry Franklin for Alive and Kicking Theatre Company

15.03.13