

Early Years Creative
Collaboration Project 2008
Small keys open big doors



Foreword

This project has been an excellent example of strong working partnerships aimed at improving outcomes for children.

While not all projects produced an end product, the evidence of the project's success has been obvious in all those centres involved. The process itself was indeed part of the learning.

Staff in centres have been inspired by working with the artists and have found that they have enabled children to really explore their creativity.

This document outlines the project journey and includes individual work with centres.

The most important outcome is an acknowledgement that this work needs to be continued in the future.

Pam Tideswell
Head of Sure Start and Early Years

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Project overview

As part of Manchester Education Partnership's Continuous Professional Development training, a module was offered in 2004 and 2005, entitled Developing a Creative Approach to Learning in the Foundation Stage. Each setting involved children and practitioners working together on child-initiated projects alongside a creative practitioner.

Inspired by The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibition, expressions of interest were invited from early years settings that wished to participate in a revised and extended creative collaboration project.

The main drive was to create an understanding of creativity that would lead to a change in culture and thus enable conditions for creative learning to exist in the centres. It was predicted that this would then impact on outcomes for children and provide a unique opportunity for professional development for those directly involved.



The following evaluation examines the key issues for the centres involved and identifies the positive and negative factors that influenced the various outcomes. It also gives possibilities for building on this highly successful work, both to embed the existing good practice and maximise its potential for other children's centres.

It is a combined evaluation that reflects the views of all collaborative partners, including artists, practitioners, heads of centres, children's centre teachers, parents and managers. Through sharing the highs and lows of involvement it gives an insight into the way in which participation in a project of this nature can impact on practice and professional development. The intention was that the aims would be achieved through a collaborative process between early years practitioners, managers and creative practitioners.

Project aims:

- Maximise the potential for children's achievement, through a creative approach to learning
- Enhance opportunities for children to develop a broader range of self-expression through a wide range of experiences
- Provide opportunities for practitioners to develop their understanding of how a creative approach can enable children to broaden both their learning and experiences
- Develop practice within centres in order to facilitate creative learning
- Promote the essential nature of creativity in everyday life and the learning possibilities for children and their families.

Awareness – empowerment – change

Collaboration

*'If we are to learn about the deepest form of collaboration, we must accept and exchange our tools, equipment, skills and knowledge. We must also know when to listen and respect each other's experiences and provide a space and opportunity to collectively grow and develop within this.'*¹

Twelve artists were employed as part of the project, working in 13 childcare settings. Ten artists completed the required days and input. Unforeseen personal circumstances and illness resulted in two artists being unable to fulfil their commitment. All artists were fully engaged, attending their required days, training and twilight sessions. Involvement in the collaborative process meant that many artists were involved in wider activities that impacted positively on the centre's development. In their role as creative practitioners, artists took part in and led training days, parental workshops, staff meetings and planning meetings, and in some cases they became accepted as part of the team.

The following statement considers three potential factors, which provide fertile ground for the seeds of collaboration:

*'First, that collaboration emerges and flourishes under certain sets of circumstances; second, that it is diversity, rather than commonality and similarity, which makes collaboration fruitful and necessary; and third, that collaboration is founded on mutual interest.'*²

It was communicated from the start that full engagement and participation in this project from management and the nominated practitioners would be necessary for maximum impact. It was evident that there were varying degrees of engagement from individual centres

in terms of management support. However, most of the nominated collaborative teams (artists, practitioners, children's centre teachers) were fully committed in terms of the intentions of the project and the concept of collaboration.

Where management remained involved, beyond the initial expression of interest and the beginnings of the project, the heightened successes were evident. For these centres, the project truly led and shaped the whole centre's development and became integral to its fabric shaping policies, practice and experiences for children.

*'...this year-long model with 40 full days spent at a centre, the ethos of the project, and many other things that set it apart from most others, is something I feel should be embraced and repeated all over the UK.'*³

One team demonstrated how they had embraced the concept of collaboration and through a process of active participation changed the way in which they worked to facilitate creative learning. This was reflected in the following responses:

'It has been everything that we wanted and more; it has helped us grow as a whole centre and to also realise how much is out there.'

*'We have chosen to answer this evaluation together, as that reflects the way we have approached the project.'*⁴

¹ M. Fujii, taken from a 'Critical Pedagogy', an MA assignment written about collaboration

² Stephen Wright – expanding from a statement taken from the work of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss

³ Creative collaborator

⁴ Collaborative team working in a Sure Start children's centre

Environment

The evaluations proved that many centres did not foresee how involvement in the project would change the way they would begin to perceive the environment as the potential third educator.

*'A major aim of the project was for each centre to allocate an area as a creative space or the equivalent of an atelier in a Reggio Centre. This was done in some form in most centres, but in a number of centres the artists felt they were expected to carry out a 'makeover' of that space. The intention of the project was that this should be an evolutionary process with all involved taking creative ownership over time and sustaining this after the project had ended. There was a strong feeling in some centres that this new use would cease at the end of the project and practice would return to what staff saw as normal.'*⁵

When used flexibly and creatively, the environment can create the optimum conditions for creativity for children and adults.

*'Took a piece of architectural space, a dead end and turned it into a hub.'*⁶

Particular areas within centres were identified as spaces for change with the intention of providing a catalyst, not just for physical change, but for a change in perceptions, attitude and practice. The centres that have embraced this philosophy have made huge changes to such spaces, which form a dialogue with children and provide opportunities for creative exploration and risk-taking. The important lesson learned here was how to recognise the potential learning opportunities such spaces offer. A change in space should not just be cosmetic; that is, it is not about simply following a specific design formula or 'decorating' a space to make it look

'nice'. The 'inhabitants' of these spaces (staff, children, artists and parents) have been involved in a collective process of adapting key spaces to invite interactive, multisensory exploration and imaginative, meaningful activities. Such changes take place after careful thought and consideration, and where clear reasons are provided for adapting such spaces. These spaces become an integral part of the learning process for children. They provide a sense of meaning and form a site for the individual and collective memories. Having this organic approach to the use of space keeps an environment alive and exciting, moving well away from corporate, standardised, static provision.



⁵ Creative collaborator

⁶ Creative Collaborative team at Benchill during celebration day

Engaging with cultural centres

*'The children were eager to share their responses to the museum and show me the animals and environments they were building, and I listened as they used new language they had learned at the museum in their play. The adults were just as excited when sharing their story room. On entering I instantly wanted to get comfortable, listen to a story being told and watch it unfold on the walls around me.'*⁷

A post of Early Years Co-ordinator (Consortium of Museum and Galleries Manchester) was created in May 2006. Funded by Renaissance, the remit was to work with museums and galleries in the city, in partnership with Sure Start/early years settings, to develop new and meaningful experiences for children under five, working with childcare practitioners and parents/carers. This provided a unique opportunity to make new contacts and gain an overview of early years initiatives across the city. It was at this time that recruitment for the creative collaboration project, funded by Sure Start, was taking place. A decision was made to explore the use of Manchester Museum as a creative space working together with Rusholme Sure Start Children's Centre. Another outcome was 'Imagine their Shadows', an exploratory and experimental project that provided the opportunity for very young children to explore space, environment and collections in a completely new way. The outcome was an exhibition at the museum featuring a film, text, photographs and evaluation by the Performance Learning and Heritage Unit at the University of Manchester. This project has been a model for further collaboration between museums, galleries, children's centres and artists. (See appendices.)

The partnerships between museums, galleries and the creative collaboration project have created opportunities for professionals from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines to

develop dynamic, new and relevant practices for children. It has provided an opportunity for everyone to share expertise and take part in professional development, influencing practice at the highest levels.

It has raised awareness of the learning opportunities for young children who visit museums and galleries, using them as a community resource. It has also created opportunities to involve parents in their children's learning: for example, being able to accompany their children on visits or being able to share the experience through displays and celebratory events at the settings. Gallery and museum staff also participated in these events.

*'The collaborative projects have been stimulating and rewarding and have had positive outcomes for everybody involved. They have brought together professionals from different backgrounds with the common aim of giving the young children we work with the best possible experiences and learning opportunities so that we are able to develop their full potential. I am looking forward to the next year.'*⁸



⁷ Amanda Shore – Manchester Museum Early Years' team response when visiting a Sure Start children's centre involved in the project

⁸ Elaine Bates Early Years Co-ordinator (Consortium of Museums and Galleries Manchester)

Engaging with parents

Many of the centres ensured that parents were aware and involved in elements of the project. Where there were parental gatherings, events and workshops linked to the project, the following outcomes were evident.

- Parents gained an increased understanding of their children's learning in non-threatening and 'fun' circumstances
- Parents' perceptions and understanding of 'messy', potentially undesirable activities changed – parents saw the potential learning and sensory experiences that were possible, recognising the value of this wider range of activities
- Parents have become more involved in the documenting of children's learning; the learning journeys that were created at Gorton South inspired parents to have increased involvement in their child's learning.

While one creative collaborator felt that there could have been even stronger links between parents and the local community, another felt that the project:

*'provided parents with an informed view of what their children are capable of achieving'*⁹

*'I became involved in this project as a parent by talking to Thomas about his experiences and looking at the documentation. Watching footage of my child involved in a variety of experiences brought tears of joy to my eyes. I am really pleased my son has had these wonderful experiences.'*¹⁰

This project has the potential to strengthen our parental partnerships, by encouraging parents to get involved beyond passive participation into the realms of open and active dialogue, working towards a truer form of collaboration.



"My Dad" A child's work with clay

⁹ Creative collaborator

¹⁰ Parent

Management involvement/ownership

The centres where management were clearly involved in the project had the most sustainable success. This involvement included being part of the communication process, supporting staff and the artist on a day-to-day basis and including professional development for all staff based around the project in training days and staff meetings. This involvement went beyond superficial management into ownership, and it is here where the maximum impact can be seen. These managers were open to developing a new approach to practice. Indeed they put their trust in the project and its participants and saw themselves as integral to this partnership.

There is evidence that some heads of centre and managers felt detached from the project. There are various reasons for this: some centres were new and had a building and centre team to develop; some centres had a change of staffing that impacted on knowledge and ownership; and some teams inherited the project. This was mainly where there were changes in staff teams that could not have been foreseen. These often extenuating circumstances meant that the full potential of the project could not be realised.

Most centres had a children's centre teacher involved in the project. This support and involvement was crucial in leading the staff team in developing this new approach. The teachers were often a main driver in the developments, leading the planning sessions, activities with the artist, children and staff and organising parental activities.

*'I feel I played a 'distant' supportive role. I was there if needed on the odd occasion, but due to the dedication, hard work and commitment of the staff team and in particular our teacher, I was able to stand back and observe the process the team went through.'*¹¹

*'The project was seen as a potential catalyst for reflective practice, enabling those involved to challenge, question and develop practice across the whole centre.'*¹²

Teachers were often a key link that established the collaborative partnership. However, some way into the project the workload of some teachers changed. This negatively affected the project, as they were unable to commit the same amount of time to supporting and developing the project. Senior practitioners and many of the centre practitioners were also vital to the success of the project. One centre had no support from a children's centre teacher and little support from the head of centre but was highly successful. One of the contributing factors to this was the excellence of the practitioner, who took on the role that many of the teachers adopted.



¹¹ Head of centre

¹² Sure Start children's centre teacher

Staff and practice development

Involvement in the project offered a unique piece of continuing professional development. The initial four training days explored creativity and encouraged children's centre staff to think much more openly about how they approached creativity both personally and professionally. This brought participants out of their comfort zones. As one centre worker noted:

'There were some shared perceptions about the importance of the process and not the finished product.'¹³

Four twilight meetings offered a chance to reflect and challenge practice in a way that one-off training does not allow. Twilight sessions provided the opportunity for participants to share project developments through conversation and documentation, in the form of sketchbooks, photos, children's work, key quotes, observations and even film. Practitioners, managers and artists were also each provided with the opportunity to gain peer support, as time was allowed for discussion in their own professional groups.



Other experiences that came about through this project have also enabled further professional development, eg. for many children's centre staff this was their first experience of working alongside a creative practitioner. Links were also established with theatres, museums and art galleries. Meanwhile, further self-directed research was stimulated by a desire to find out more following the training input. Engagement in the project has given staff the opportunity to develop reflective practice. As one children's centre teacher stated:

'The best CPD ever – it has helped me grow in my role and influenced me in ways I never imagined possible.'¹⁴

Likewise the artists also had a fulfilling experience of professional development:

'I have never seen my girlfriend tear her hair out over anything as much as she has done for this project! But I have never seen her so animated about anything work-related either. The house and car have become a Sure Start storage site: every time we passed a charity shop or skip we had to see what we could take from it; every time we passed a house window she had to get her notepad out to write down a new idea, whether it be from the colour scheme or the way the shadows reflected on the wall! Every time she talks about the centre she is working in, I want to go down there and see for myself. Anything that can captivate her attention as much as this must surely be worth seeing.'¹⁵

Many of the artists had not worked so closely with early years children and most of them had not worked in children's centres; this in itself has proved an eye-opener to working with very young children. Some centres chose to focus the

work of collaboration on the youngest children, working with the under-tuos. This had an extremely positive effect in broadening the range of experiences and materials that are now used with these children. The effect of this at one centre has been observed and quoted within their recent Quality Assurance report. Another secondary effect of this work has been the raising of practitioner expectations of the capacity of young children to engage in a wider range of activities that stimulate and extend their receptiveness. The necessity of having a better understanding of child development and to develop practice that is in tune with these children has been highlighted.

*'In terms of learning, I have learned more than I could have dreamed of, developed more confidence in my own practice, and learned more about child development and how they learn.'*¹⁶

A range of artists from varying creative backgrounds took part in the project. This has enhanced the experience for all and led to a sharing of practice that has benefited all artists as well as the practitioners. Practice was shared at the twilights but was not always given enough reflection time.



¹³ Centre worker

¹⁴ Sure Start children's centre teacher

¹⁵ Partner of an artist

¹⁶ Creative collaborator

The impact

- Documentation that looks more carefully at children's responses and interprets them to give information on development. Learning journeys have become more personalised and the parental feedback has been fantastic
- Planning that is much more in tune with children and their creativity
- Activities that enable children to have a broader range of sensory and stimulating experiences, encountering a wider range of materials and resources, such as porcelain clay, clay slip, natural materials, light, shadow, reflections, colour, cellulose and acrylic paint. Using everyday resources, children began to explore sound, varied musical instruments, and den-making. All these experiences happened both inside and outside
- Practitioners that are more confident in offering and using these resources
- Policies have been developed; for example, a policy on learning journeys as a consequence of a centre's development in their documentation, and also a policy on creativity.



Budget and building restrictions

The management of the allocated budget proved to be problematic. It was suggested that the centres spent their £3,000 budget on environmental developments. The success of this spending was variable depending on the centre, whether they had clearly given this responsibility to a named person, and whether this person was able to communicate with the cost centre budget-holder.

Many centres developed their environments through making significant changes, such as creating a central stage space, a studio space and outdoor willow tunnels and domes, etc. These changes have been carried out due to a desire to both use the environment as the 'third educator' and to challenge practice.

These changes may not stay forever, as they will probably alter with the changing group of children. As one manager reflected: **'Next time, it will be a different time, with different staff and different children.'** This embodies the spirit of collaboration, as it is a living and changing entity that is never finished; it is the process of learning together.

Some centres developed their environments through purchasing and adding furniture and resources to their existing environments. These changes, though beneficial, have less long-term impact and would not contribute or reflect a change in practice.

As part of the initial training we invited a lighting consultant to give a demonstration on the potential effects of lighting to create mood and atmosphere. Many centres have a very institutionalised atmosphere and a harsh light source generated by fluorescents.

This 'flat' lighting provides no possibilities for creating different atmospheres or for exploring light and shadow. Many centres were drawn to the idea of altering the lighting in their centres. With hindsight, if we had known how problematic any changes to the lighting would be, we would not have presented this as a possibility. While acknowledging that the constraints on this kind of work sit within the corporate Council policies, it is worth considering here the effect of the restriction of creative ideas on our centre leaders.



We need to ask, do we wish to have uniform institutions? Or do we wish to generate provision that reflects the people, their ideas and community in a creative way?

Impact on children's learning

A clear message from the celebration day was the powerful influence the project was having on the experiences of children in the centres.

*'Documentation should be about a process rather than a collection of snapshots, using equipment fit for purpose, encouraging reflection for children and practitioners alike, and looking at the journey rather than the end product.'*¹⁷

*'Children's creative activity used to be restricted and contained, controlled by adults. We have had to overcome the barriers of children 'getting messy' and children not liking the thought of being messy, to ensure that children's creativity is now nurtured with children taking the lead.'*¹⁸

*'The concept that the environment is within enables children to take their creative potential with them wherever they go.'*¹⁹

*'Providing materials to inspire children and introducing them to different techniques.'*²⁰

*'Capturing moments of awe and wonder on children's faces as they discovered new things.'*²¹



¹⁷ Hallam Road – celebration day presentation.

¹⁸ Collyhurst – celebration day.

¹⁹ Rusholme – celebration day presentation.

²⁰ Higher Blackley – celebration day presentation.

²¹ Head of centre.

Our community

Increasing the visibility of very young children within the community has been one consequence of this project. This has had a positive effect on children, practitioners' confidence when taking children out, and on the services the children have accessed. The links that have been made with the museums and galleries have influenced the development of their practice and future planned provisions for under-fives.

Rusholme, Martenscroft and Gorton South have engaged with Manchester Museum through their project, and the work from these centres has been displayed in the Museum for all to see.

There are other examples of how the project has created opportunities: one artist is a resident at the Royal Exchange Theatre; this was the first time she had worked with the under-fives as the Royal Exchange usually offers workshops for children aged five and over. However, as a consequence of the increased visibility of Manchester's youngest members of the community, Newton Heath, Benchill and Longsight Sure Start Children's Centres were invited to contribute to an exhibition, 'YOU ARE HERE', held at the theatre at the end of June 2008. This involved creating a world within an old school desk, and the children and their families worked with creative practitioners both at the theatre and in their own local environment.



Future thoughts on taking collaborative work forward

Part of the success of this project has been the identification of the potential barriers, and as such it has provided a clear and concise criterion for any further development.

*'We need to think of the celebration day as being an acknowledgement of where we are at in terms of our journey. We are talking about something as if it's over, but it is really just the beginning.'*²²

Main factors that supported successful projects

- Strong artist, confident in their field
- Management support and involvement evident from head of centre, operational manager, children's centre teacher, practitioner and a wider group of staff
- Centre had a more pragmatic approach to involvement in the project; where there were less defined expectations of the artist, the artist had a greater impact
- Centre had an initial desire to experiment and to engage with change, which was matched by their own previous developments that put them in a position of openness for this project
- A strong early years philosophy already evident in individuals and in the team – management that has an early years background
- Clear strategic involvement from the beginning and throughout the project by heads of centre
- Organisation and development of the project as a whole by a designated team
- The engagement of children in decision-making processes, including changes they might want to make to their environment.

Risk factors to avoid

- Selection process – this needs to be much tighter, eg. consistency of application (needs to be written by the management team, including head of centre), centre's position for embracing this project (the ability to balance this with other work), position of staff team (new team/stable team/new building etc)
- Training – a new approach has to be developed. A resistance to change and a different approach to working has been identified as a barrier. Any training should go out to the whole staff team so that there can be full engagement and participation, and so that the project is seen as the responsibility of everyone
- Planning and positioning of the building, territorial and working relationships that surround the children's centre where it is a co-located site. Where these relationships are strained, there is a negative effect on the potential success of the collaboration. Clear collaborative working needs to be demonstrated on application, with representation from the head of centre and headteacher
- Detachment from the project by the head of centre narrowed the potential capacity for development. The head of centre's involvement and participation needs to be built upon to counteract this.

Ideas for the future

- Building a pilot for establishing creative collaboration as a role within early years provision – developing provision that is in compliance with the practice guidance for the EYFS
- Full team training days across the year, so that immersion in the philosophy happens for all – these days to be negotiated, a minimum of three/four
- Whole-centre involvement from the beginning
- Smaller number of centres and artists across the city, focused within districts and a Sure Start Children's Centre as a link with another provider, eg. childminders, adults and toddlers, sessional play
- Someone to lead the pilot – to organise, develop and support the progress
- Collaborative group of artists that support each other, with mentoring and development
- Themes for research/development. Exploring questions about children's creativity; thinking about impact on practice, and focusing within the theme based on varying areas, such as observation and documentation, environment, enriched experiences, community connections
- Children's voices and visibility as a leading factor for the collaboration.



The Manchester Museum

small keys open big doors

Who we worked with:

Gorton South Sure Start Centre

Our aims:

- to use Manchester Museum as an environment for under-fives where they can play and explore, learn and develop
- to use Manchester Museum as a stimulus for learning
- to increase active and independent learning in the museum
- to develop a self-programmed interactive model for early years practitioners and their groups.

*'These visits have been an absolute success for all involved.'*²³

*'We want to stay here to do some more.'*²⁴

What we did:

The children from Gorton Mount visited Manchester Museum for a series of visits over a period of six weeks. The children, aged two to four years, explored the different spaces and objects within the museum using torches and magnifying glasses. The children enjoyed an animal hunt using an explorer sack and the opportunity to see the live animals in the museum. They also had the chance to investigate the treasure box in the Living Cultures Gallery.

The staff used video cameras, digital cameras and post-it observations to document the children's learning journeys. The children were enthused and inspired by their visits, and in response a story room was developed back at the centre. A magic key allows children to enter the room, where they can read a range of animal stories and explore the movement and sound of the animals using different materials and instruments. A sharing event was organised in Gorton South, where experiences and achievements were celebrated.

The outcomes:

- a model for working with early years groups has been developed
- benefits of regular visits to the museum have been identified
- explorer sacks have been developed that can be used by all visiting early years groups
- children's language and speaking and listening skills have developed
- the experience has influenced the early learning opportunities for under five's within the museum. It has identified the importance of child initiated learning and learning through play and exploration within the learning programmes
- positive influence on the way early years practitioners regard the museum
- a raised interest and awareness amongst early years practitioners of how and why to use Manchester Museum.

*'The story sack was a huge success.'*²⁵

²³ Early years practitioner

²⁴ Child aged four

²⁵ Creative practitioner

How we evaluated:

We collated observations of the children's responses and learning outcomes. We also interviewed the adults involved back at the centre. They identified learning opportunities, key outcomes and links to the Early Years Foundation Stage. They also outlined logistics of a series of visits, effective activities and further suggestions. The evaluation provides a wealth of knowledge to filter into our learning programmes and identifies exciting opportunities for under-fives in the museum.

Is it sustainable:

The self programmed visits model is transferable to all early years groups. There has been a raised number of early years visits in response to this shared positive experience. The explorer sacks are low maintenance. Front of house staff/learning team need to administer and book out the explorer sacks. CPD will empower practitioners and encourage use of explorer sacks during self programmed visits.

Want to find out more?

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www.manchestermuseum.co.uk



People's History Museum

the little people's history museum

Who we worked with:

Higher Blackley Children's Centre

Our aims:

- to explore opportunities for using museums and galleries as a resource for delivering early years outcomes
- to involve parents in their children's learning and use the free resources of museums and galleries
- for museum staff to develop their practice with early years
- to inform development of the new museum and its programme for under-fives
- for children and parents to have fun and learn things – particularly in language development and creativity
- to build a relationship with Higher Blackley Children's Centre.

*'I really enjoyed it and my children did too; the trip was excellent.'*²⁶

What we did:

We worked with the Monday Funday Club, a carer and toddler group. The group worked on activities in the centre related to the idea of going on a journey, and made a mixed media map, including drawing, collage, and hand and foot printing.

The group visited the museum and were encouraged to explore the galleries and follow the children's interests. Everyone was given a disposable camera to record their experiences of the day. The group had great fun exploring the interactive activities in the museum – making felt banners, building arches, hiding in big baskets and playing with Punch and Judy.

The flying colours shadow carousel at the museum captured the group's interest and prompted a lot of discussion about who the shadow figures could be. Back at the children's centre the group worked on a shadow silhouette window display and were very excited looking at the photos from the disposable cameras. The photos were made into a beautiful banner, which the group decorated to display at their centre.

The outcomes:

- Museum staff increased their knowledge of how to engage early years groups
- An increased awareness of potential barriers to accessing museum resources
- A relationship between the museum and the children's centre for future work together
- Increased awareness for parents and centre staff of the museum services available for them and how to access them
- New experiences for the children
- Shared group experience of going on the trip; opportunities for group bonding
- The benefits of children and parents working collaboratively on creative work linked to the visit for their centre, and opportunities for discussion/language development
- The foundations for the development of a new programme of activities for early years visitors at the new museum.



²⁶ Parent

How we evaluated:

Photographs were taken of the children's experiences and their responses were recorded each week. Parents were interviewed too, and we learned a lot about the logistics of planning a visit to the museum with a large group situated outside the city centre. The museum and children's centre staff met at the end of the project to discuss outcomes and identify ways of continuing the relationship between the centre and the museum. Through documenting the children's interests and evaluating the potential barriers to accessing the museum and its displays, this has given us a great wealth of knowledge that will feed in to the redevelopment of the museum galleries and the programme of activities we offer for under-fives.

Is it sustainable?

Involvement in this project has provided us with a unique opportunity to develop our practice with under-fives. The People's History Museum is currently closed for redevelopment until late 2009 and a programme of early years activities, including story-telling and craft workshops, are currently under development for the new museum. Activity sacks and other gallery resources will also be developed to aid self-guided visits in the future.

Want to find out more?

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Manchester Art Gallery journey through buildings

Who we worked with:

St Peter's Children's Centre

Our aims:

- to build up a mutually beneficial relationship between St Peter's and Manchester Art Gallery and to explore ways in which the children's centre can work with MAG to develop and support children's creativity
- start to develop a sustainable ongoing relationship between the centre and MAG
- experiment with how we can support children to shape their own learning experiences
- focus on developing creativity and inspiration
- investigate ways of involving parents in their child's learning

- equip children's centre staff with the tools to document children's learning
- develop a prototype toolkit to support children's centres to use the gallery and follow-up work in the children's centre.

What we did:

The project took place over eight sessions between January and April 2008 at St Peter's Children's Centre and Manchester Art Gallery. Three out of the eight sessions were with staff only, to ensure we had plenty of time to plan and review progress.

During the first exploratory visit, the glass bridge linking the old part of the gallery with the new

extension fascinated the children. We developed the theme of bridges and the sea in the sessions that followed, creating bridges from lights and translucent fabrics and developing games and role-play. One of the most successful elements in the project was the discovery of the 'boat' – an orange carpet that the children sailed through to the gallery to look at works of art. The boat created a sense of belonging and attached the children to an ongoing theme and journey. They guided their boat to traditional paintings by Turner and contemporary art in Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba's video piece, *The Ground, the Root, and the Air: The Passing of the Bodhi Tree*, and responded by creating soundscapes, collages, drawings, role-play and new ways of looking at artworks.

The outcomes:

The project has led us to develop a new session for parents with children aged five and under at the gallery. Using what we have learnt from the project, it will be exploratory-based, multisensory and focused on encouraging children to lead their parents around the gallery. The under-fives workshop will also be taken out to early years settings using the same theme of exploration.

We hope this session will give parents and group leaders practical advice on what to expect from Manchester Art Gallery, along with ideas about what they might find when they visit. We also intend to create a self-programmed resource to help them navigate around the gallery.

The project helped to develop the children's communication and social skills. The children learned a new language, and the den building and boats encouraged collaboration. One boy in particular struggled with his verbal communication skills but became incredibly

animated while watching the video piece.

Many of the centre staff had not visited the gallery before. The project helped them to see that the gallery could be a resource for the children's centre.

How we evaluated:

Observations and discussions, which took place at the end of each session, were recorded in a learning diary.

Is it sustainable?

The early years family programmes that have resulted from the project are reliant on Renaissance funding to continue.

Want to find out more?

Contact Alex Thorp
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*'The project gave us the freedom to experiment.'*²⁷



²⁷ Centre worker

Museum of Science and Industry

Music and Movement: 'Ssh, Ssh, Click, Click'

Who we worked with:

Poundswick Children's Centre

Our aims:

- To explore opportunities for the Children's Centre to use museums and galleries as a resource for delivering early years outcomes and to embed this in its practice and to offer professional development opportunities for Centre staff
- To offer opportunities for the Museum to develop new practice which can feed into the early years programme
- To encourage the children to have fun and learn from the unexpected – particularly in language development and creativity.

What we did:

The project was delivered through three outreach visits to the centre and two visits to the museum. The first outreach visit was to meet the staff and children involved and to familiarise them with museum themes eg. trains, machines, movement, sounds and to introduce the musical elements of fast, slow, high, low, loud, quiet, rhythm, patterns. It was a good opportunity to learn different techniques for recording events and observations. We learned how children can surprise with creative ways of using basic equipment.

The children, aged two and a half to three years, then visited Xperitots at MOSI. They loved pressing buttons and anything involving manipulation. Colour and movement within the gallery provided the stimulus for some exciting creative work later in the project. During a second visit, the children visited the Power Hall and were fascinated with the moving machines and very keen to copy any movements and sounds. These ideas were used to create and sing a machine song, explore patterns on drums, and play percussion instruments.

Two follow-up outreach sessions followed during which more children were able to take part. The last outreach session was a celebration of the children's achievements, they were presented with a visual record of the project in the form of a bound photograph album.

The outcomes:

- For MOSI staff - increased understanding of working with Sure Start Children's Centres eg. staffing, organisation, resources, facilities
- For Centre staff - increased staff knowledge of MOSI and what it can offer young children
- Experience of working with a creative practitioner/musician
- Refocusing on Xperitots, its organisation, purpose and links to EYFS
- Enthusiasm for working in a similar way in the future with other early years settings, and for developing further music projects and links with partners
- New early years sessions and carer and tots sessions are being developed from the music and movement themes and activities explored during the visits.



How we evaluated:

Brief discussions were held with staff present during or at the end of each session. Observations made during the sessions in the form of post-it notes, photographs, and comments were used to develop the following session. Lead staff from the Museum and Centre contributed to an end of project evaluation and a visual record of the project was produced in the form of a photograph album.

Is it sustainable?

- Further projects using the model of outreach/ visits are being planned with other children's centres
- CPD events for practitioners are being held at the museum
- The project highlighted the problem with transport costs and this may need to be discussed at a more strategic level.

Want to find out more?

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The Whitworth Art Gallery through the eyes of a child

Who we worked with:

Slade Lane and Broom Avenue Sure Start Children's Centres

Our Aims:

- to use The Whitworth Art Gallery as an environment for Under 5's where they can play and explore, learn and develop.
- to use The Whitworth Art Gallery as a stimulus for learning.
- to increase active and independent learning in the museum.

'I liked the dark, dark room and the dragon the best!' ²⁸

What we did:

The Gallery worked in collaboration with Slade Lane Children's Centre on a 2- week project that involved 12 children aged 2-4 years and some parents.

The children visited the gallery for two open-ended sessions, where they used torches, magnifying glasses and disposable cameras to explore the building and artworks. The staff used video cameras, digital cameras and posts it observations to document the children's learning journeys. At the end of each session, the key themes of interest were identified, which informed the starting point for the next session. The main themes to emerge from our project were dragons and dens!

'I didn't realise this gallery had so much to offer children.' ²⁹

²⁸ Child aged 2

²⁹ Parent

The Outcomes:

- posters – made from photographs taken by the children have been produced and circulated around the Gallery and Centre. These have dual benefits, as souvenir of the project and also an advocacy tool to promote our work to the wider sector.
- established a successful model for working with early years groups and families.
- benefits of regular visits to the museum have been identified.
- positive influence on the way early years practitioners regard the museum.
- subsequent CPD events have raised interest and awareness amongst early years practitioners of how and why to use The Whitworth Art Gallery.
- improved links between Formal and Informal Learning Programmes

Is it sustainable?

As a result of the success of this project, we wanted to offer a similar model of working to other Centres. However, we were aware that these would have to be self-supporting and not require on-going funding to support them.

We now offer linked sessions from the Early Years programme and the Family programme. For example, centres can book an open-ended session at the gallery and receive a follow-up visit back in their centre to extend the activity with children and their families.

The Whitworth Art Gallery:
Through the Eyes of a Child

How we evaluated:

Adults were asked to log any comments or observations using post-it notes, which were collected and compiled at the end of each session.

These were helpful in establishing the key themes of interest, which then informed the next session. The lead Artist kept a sketchbook throughout the project. This was filled with photographs the children and adults had taken throughout the project, along with a written account of each session.

Want to find out more?

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Finally, here are some memorable quotes, which we hope will provide some food for thought. We hope this project has indeed sowed the seeds of change and that it can be continued in some way. When all participants were asked to sum up involvement in the project in three or more words, there were varying responses that reflected the challenging, difficult and rewarding journey of creative collaboration.

'Inspirational, thought-provoking, magical and successful' ³⁰

'A complete success!' ³¹

'Small keys open big doors' ³²



³⁰ Op manager

³¹ Head of centre

³² Sure Start children's centre teacher

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- Benchill Sure Start Children's Centre: Lyndene Road
- Claremont Sure Start Children's Centre and Claremont Road Primary School
- Collyhurst Sure Start Children's Centre and Nursery School
- Newton Heath Sure Start Children's Centre: Hallam Road
- Gorton South Sure Start Children's Centre
- Higher Blackley Sure Start Children's Centre
- Martenscroft Sure Start Children's Centre and Nursery School
- Poundswick Sure Start Children's Centre
- Rusholme Sure Start Children's Centre
- Wetherby Sure Start Children's Centre
- Old Moat Sure Start Children's Centre
- Scout Drive Sure Start Children's Centre

