



CASE STUDY

Elements: Supporting creativity in Early Years settings across Somerset

Setting: Abacus Nursery, Taunton

Type: Nursery

Lead EYP name: Emma Haines

Artist name: Hannah Lefeuvre

Artform: Movement, music and Story making

Term date: Spring 2017

Average number of children and age: Two groups per week, equating to 18 children per day over 6 weeks. Age group: 2, 3 and 4 year olds in the Toddler and Pre-school room

Average number of adults and type: One artist and one member of staff in each session.

Research question: Exploring simple ways of unlocking staff's imagination in order to develop children's creativity.

Activity:

Over six mornings, we developed movement, music and story sessions in an 'Expressive Arts and Design Room' separate from the main nursery, which became the 'Art Studio' as part of the planning for Take Art sessions. The artist aligned her work with planning at the setting, exploring the following themes:

- **Handa's Surprise** – as the setting's theme was animal prints for the week, the artist took in a bag of animal print socks and tights, which became puppet animals that the children encountered as they journeyed through the story. When they arrived at Akeyo's village, after a celebratory dance, Akeyo hung out her washing (the socks) on the washing line, as a means of recalling the animals they had seen on the journey.
- **Valentine's Hearts** – as it was Valentine's Day, the artist used an old storybook, which featured hearts that became bigger throughout. Lollypop sticks were used throughout the story, first as imaginary lollies, then as oars, planters for seeds, fishing rods and so on.

- **Fictional animals and a journey to space to meet Aliens** – during the 'fictional animals' week, the first session drew on the children's own ideas about what their fictional animals might look like, how it would move, eat and so on. In the second session, inspired by 'The Man on the Moon – a Man named Bob' storybook, we journeyed to the moon, collecting and exploring newspaper on the way and keeping our eye out for Aliens!
- **Harry and the Bucketful of Dinosaurs and dinosaur movement and rhymes** – during two dinosaur weeks, we first explored Harry's story of dinosaurs, by entering into the dark attic, finding the box of dinosaurs with our torches, then taking them on a journey. In the second week, we used a book of dinosaur rhymes to frame our movement.
- **Spring animals** – in the final session, we explored spring animals, in time for Easter. The repeated frame of 'what's in the box?' became the indicator for each spring animal. For example, a duck prompted a journey to the duck pond, the rabbit needed help delivering eggs and the frogs jumped into the pool.



At each session, a pathway was created from the main nursery to the 'Art Studio' (for example, with dinosaur footprints, eggs, animal foot prints and so on). Children came in two groups during the morning, to work for approximately 45-minute sessions.

Research findings:

Feedback from Abacus

Our plan was to use the sessions as CPD for all staff to explore their imaginations in different ways, but it was clear that for the sessions to be most valuable to the children and support Hannah it was better to have an experienced member of staff who already used their imagination brilliantly and was tuned into Hannah's ideas. We tried at different times to interject different staff to see the lovely, simple ideas in action, but kept returning to Emma whose enthusiasm and imagination worked best with Hannah. They built an excellent partnership.

There were very minor behaviour challenges initially where children tested Hannah, but Emma stepping in without undermining Hannah quickly resolved these. In retrospect, we feel we should have shared our behaviour policy with Hannah prior to the sessions so that we were all consistent in our approach and had the same expectations.

Emma has already begun to cascade some of the ideas into practice within the setting and will feedback / demonstrate to all staff at a team meeting. In this instance, this seemed to be the best approach for everyone.

As the sessions progressed, and the partnership grew, Hannah would email ideas and ask what resources the setting had and so on. On reflection, we could have implemented this sort of communication prior to the event, but it was a learning experience for all involved and we had no idea the partnership would be so positive and supportive of each other.

As a setting, our initial expectation was that we were going to experience a Take Art touring show or more arts and crafts related, as we had attended one of these. However, once we realised we had inappropriate expectations we embraced Hannah and her storytelling and expressive art skills, and developed her ideas.



Feedback from the artist:

Working in a designated, uninterrupted space, with a reasonable number of children and a member of staff present throughout each session, was an incredibly supportive set-up, which enabled the sessions to run smoothly. Children went to the toilet and had a quick drink before and after the session, which meant that distractions were minimised and the children had magical experiences.

As the weather improved, there was a greater desire for the children to have time outside and so some of the sessions became slightly shorter. Given more time at the setting, the artist would have been interested in developing outdoor elements, using more of the children's ideas, or perhaps creating stories from objects. With more time,

the artist would also like to explore developing ideas with staff each week, to increase the sense of shared ownership.

Quotes:

Parent:

One parent commented that her child was continually referring to the 'shoe shop' at home and at the setting, the same child asked 'where's Hannah's car?'. Putting the shoes in the 'shoe shop' is the first thing that the children do on entering the art studio, suggesting that this was a significant experience for the child.

Abacus Nursery:

"We have always been child led and child centred but this has made us look at things more 'creatively' and with real meaning of 'expressive arts'. (We changed the name of the Expressive Arts and Design room to Art Studio due to having Hannah's input but actually realise it was more appropriate to be the former!) We were expecting 'art' in the form of paint, techniques etc. EAD have always been important to us but it is about giving it priority. Everything oozed the Characteristics of Effective Learning."

Artist:

"Abacus was a delightful setting to work in. The smooth running of the setting and incredible support from all staff, combined with working in a designated, uninterrupted space, allowed for fully focused sessions. The children were immediately confident and inquiring about my presence and I quickly felt welcomed into the team. I enjoyed the co-constructing rapport with Emma in the sessions and this led to a high-quality experience for the children. Although challenges did occur, as discussed at the final reflection session, these were quietly discussed and managed during the six weeks, so that there was no impact on my experience at the setting. I hugely appreciate this discretion and the honesty shown at the final reflection session. This is a setting where the child truly is at the centre of everything that is done. Thank you to everyone for making my time at Abacus so memorable."

Conclusion:

Take Art has successfully taken us back to basics to appreciate that our staff had already unlocked their imagination but had just needed confirmation that in order to enhance children's creativity they do not have to be 'artists' themselves, but working along side one has given them the confidence to have faith in their own abilities. Thank you for inspiring us.