



CASE STUDY

Elements: Supporting creativity in Early Years settings across Somerset

Setting: St George Pre School, The Mount, Taunton. TA1 3NR

Type: Nursery

Lead EYP name: Caroline Gordge

Artist name: Lucy Lean

Artform: Visual

Term date: Autumn 2016

Average number of children and age:

Average number of adults and type: EY practitioners from setting/mentee/parent/carer/shadowing artist

Research question: The effects of creativity on speech and language

Context:

St George's is quite unique in that it has fourteen different languages spoken and over 70% of the children are EAL. At some sessions there may be only one or two children who speak English as their first language. Staff treat language as a challenge rather than a barrier and employ a range of strategies to ensure good communication with the children. These can include a talking pen, visuals, signing and interpreters.

The ages in the setting range from two to four plus years and all staff and children mix and work together in one large room. Outside there is a generous covered area as well as a level, fenced, open play area backing onto the school field.

Staff plan around the children's interests and understand in order to gain their attention activities need to have an immediate impact engaging all of their senses.

I realised that an immediate hands on approach was the best way for me to introduce new materials and activities and through careful observation of the children's responses, was able to plan each week.

Activity:

My aim in choosing natural wool fibres as the key ingredient for my project sessions was to introduce an unfamiliar play material that would stimulate the senses and motivate the use of language through exploration and imagination.

Over the six weeks other materials were selected and introduced alongside the wool fibres in order to extend sensory experiences. For example, beautiful pieces of tree bark with drilled holes to poke fibres into, spiky teasels and drawstring bags for filling. A spinning demonstration led to include woollen thread and various winding and wrapping activities evolved. The sessions developed organically through observing how children responded according to their interest and focus. Several activities were a direct result of child led responses such as; mark making with fleecy covered sticks and large scale wrapping.

The children's acceptance and trust of me built quickly over the first few weeks so that by the end most had confidence to approach me directly and take an active interest in the activities and materials introduced to them. Materials were left for them after each session to encourage further experimentation by both children and staff.

Research findings: -

Artist

Creativity was focused very much on process and not outcomes.

Children had the opportunity to conduct their own explorations playfully discovering for example, some properties of the wool fibres. How it felt and behaved when dry or wet, how it could be pulled and stretched without coming apart.

Activities which involved following instructions was kept to a minimum and the children were allowed time and space to explore at their own level with adults modeling activities and supporting their play.

St George's

As a setting, when we plan any type of creative work we are very much about process rather than product, particularly with the younger children. Lucy's approach was also very open ended and she was able to let the children take the learning in whatever direction they wanted to. It was very organic. I noticed in particular that there was a lot of Science learning going on and one child actually suggested wetting the fleece in the first session to see what would happen, which was very exciting.

In fact all areas of the EYFS were being covered effortlessly and in the most natural and meaningful way for the children. As well as a lot of physical development involved in winding small and large scale weaving and making felt using bare feet, there was also Personal, Social and Emotional Development (team work involved in washing the fleece and pegging it out to dry on the wire house) Communication and Language: (Learning new



vocabulary about wool and felting as well as propositions used in weaving,) Mathematics: (Heavy and light, counting bags of fleece and sheep,) Literacy: (Ba Ba Black Sheep and stories about sheep) Understanding the World: (through learning about wool comes from, Information books about wool, using the iPad to see a sheep being sheared, we purchased some black sheep for our farm set) and of course Expressive Arts and Design as the creative work was at the centre of it all and this also encompassed dancing whilst throwing the fleece in the air!

The beauty of this project though was that all the children could be involved in some way from washing the fleece, one of them holding a basket of pegs, the other hanging it up to dry, whilst chatting away in their home language, to my favourite day when the youngest children were soaping and pummelling the wet fleece with their bare feet to make the felt.



They were so joyfully involved in a real and useful task and an important part of the felt making process. It was wonderful to see.

One of the younger members of staff told me that she was really inspired by the materials that Lucy brought in for the children to use.

Many imaginative games developed including a fishing game using pipe cleaners tied with thread and fleece. "It's wriggling".... "It's big, it's a Daddy one"

The children were involved at such a

deep level much of the time and often language came out after the session, for instance they remembered the word 'teasel' and I think this was just because they liked the way the word sounded.

It took a while for Lucy to gain the children's trust, but by the end of the project, they were all using her name and one of the Polish children even called her 'Pani' which is a mark of high respect.

Conclusion:

Our creative activities helped the children to build confidence while exploring new materials in their own way offered opportunities for new language development. The materials often triggered creative imaginative games in which conversations developed both in English and the childrens own spoken language. Verbal cooperation between the age groups was observed and new names and labels were learnt and enjoyed through repetition and acting out songs or rhymes. Frequently we found that children who were deeply engaged in their creative exploration used very little spoken language at all unless prompted by an adult. However words and actions demonstrating understanding would often emerge later.

