

Sensory Journeys Symposium

Wednesday 10th January 2018

14:00 – 17:00

Ashmount School

Abi Steady, Deputy Head teacher

Amy Williams, Support Assistant

3 pupils, Luke, Maisy and Summer

Abi - So first and foremost I'd like to say that I am so proud of Summer and Maisy and Luke, they have done a brilliant job today. We got here at half eleven, we've been spending some time in the gallery, seeing all our stuff displayed and presented. I think you guys really enjoyed that, didn't you.

Children – yeah.

What did you like best, Summer?

S – I liked all the pictures in the top gallery.

You liked the pictures in the top gallery. What did you like best Maisy?

M – I like the pictures in the gallery.

How about you Luke? I think I might know what your favourite thing was, but I'm going to ask you. What did you like the best?

L – I liked everything.

[Audience laughter]

You liked everything. How about in particular the recordable sound buttons that you could

record all your messages on? I think they might've been your favourite bit.

L – Those were my favourites.

I think they might've been.

L – I'm recording them for broadcast tomorrow at eleven o'clock.

Abi - So we brought a bigger group of students this morning to see the gallery and they really enjoyed dressing up, seeing their work up on the walls, and just seeing it professionally displayed. For one little lad that came in this morning, just seeing his name in print on the floor in the gallery was just really powerful for him, and I think, Lisa, you said to him what's your favourite bit, and he said "that I've done it", "that it was me that's done some of this", "I've done some of that". So that's those really special moments. For us magic moments are sometimes little tiny moments, little glimmers, little words, little looks, and little shared moments. But for us they're really special stuff. So I'm going to pop through a couple of slides and then I'm going to get these guys to chat to you. Because we've had the Christmas holidays, I didn't get these guys to prep before Christmas, because guess what, it was Christmas play territory and carol service and everything else. So these guys prepped this this morning, before we got into the car at ten o'clock to come down to you. So they're going to do their best, but we're going to have chat through what they experienced.

I'll just say a couple of theoretical bits. So in beginning the journey, I think I've got to be honest in saying I didn't have a proper handle on what this was all going to be, what this journey I was actually going on. I walked into the back of a meeting with Marianne and Nick, who's not here today, and got told that we were going to have lots of artists coming, and we were going to be going to visit the gallery, and it was going to be really great, and that my job was going to make sure we have rooms available and things scheduled in and I think for us to start with as teachers, I know I am certainly a bit of a control freak, for me it was all about have I got the room? Have I got the time? Have I got the resources? Does everyone know what they're doing? Have we got the list of pupils? And actually it was going to be way bigger than that, it was going to be far more overarching than that, far more all-

encompassing, and most certainly child-led. And so, much as I like to have a schedule and stick to it, this project hasn't necessarily always stuck to schedule, but that's been brilliant and we've been on a journey together. So, first of all we could see the benefits of having visiting artists in and to get those high quality artistic experiences in for our young people, obviously we're often (teachers) on Pinterest and RedTedArt and so on, but to really take that to the next level and have that real creative provocation was something that we wanted for our young people. Secondly, and to be able to get into gallery spaces and spend more time in artistic environments, we felt that was really important. Also to get some accreditation for our young people on Arts Award. Obviously a lot of our young people don't take formal examinations but actually to have some recognition of their work and their creativity was really important to us. And I think that's where my headspace was and so in communicating that to teachers, I think that's where I was at the beginning of the journey I didn't really understand Reggio Emilia at that point, I didn't really understand Sensory Atelier at that point, and so I was on a journey, I just didn't know that I was on it just yet, and neither did everybody else. [Laughter]

And so, on our first residency, firstly it came around very quickly, although we had the lovely schedules from the team, here it seemed to creep up on us rather crazily and right at the start of term we were due to start a residency with our brand new EYFS Forum 5-year-olds who had just walked through the door into a school environment. We still had some quite needy youngsters there, we had some quite needy parents there, and staff were still getting to know the young people, so that was a challenge for us because it was right at the start of the year but I know, Amy, you had a bit of different take on that than me

Amy - Yeah, I personally didn't see it as a challenge, however I wasn't with the EYFS that had just walked into a school environment for the first time. I was with a key stage 2 group and it's the first time I had ever worked with any of them, so for me it was lovely to be able to build up those relationship and build up that rapport with the students without having to sit them at a classroom, sit them at a table and say this is your expectations. It was me following them and that was one of the main reasons I think I built such a good relationship with the children that I worked with last year, because it was completely what they wanted to do. So it was, if anything, positive for me.

Abi - It taught us a lot about the amount of preparation and follow up we needed to do to get the most out of the residency. I think we were very focused on the length of the residency and right let's get this done and let's do it well, and actually what we learnt from it was that actually to get the best out of it we've got to begin working with the children before, quite a long distance before in terms of laying those foundations for the young people, getting those ideas flowing, the Reggio Emilia type thought processes, allowing them to think "yeah, I've got something to say, I've got something to offer, I know something about this already". And then also following up the work after the residency. So on our first residency we didn't do that as well but we did learn from that and I think we have got better and better at it. It really challenged us as staff to prioritise that child-led experience, we've heard a lot about that already but I think as teachers we do very much like to know what's gonna happen, and I do say to teachers to focus on the process not the product. But teachers are teachers at the end of the day, and we do like things to be a certain way and finished with a certain result, and so it really challenged us as staff to really prioritise that child-led approach, and also really got us thinking about physical proximity. We do work very closely with our young children they are allowed to sit on our knees and things like that as you might not get in a mainstream school, but the first residency was very much about very physical engagement, and you can see in a couple of the photos I've put there, maybe some quite hair-raising things with regard to health and safety and risk-assessment that challenged us... And just about what are we gaining here and how are we going to go about this? Are we comfortable as adults and individuals in a professional capacity? Are the young people comfortable? And just how to move that on.

In education we have a real dichotomy, I suppose between "are we there to, in special schools, remediate and fix difficulties and needs" or "are we there to celebrate difference and to engage and to move forward", and this approach really led us down that that route of "let's celebrate the difference, let's take what these young people have got to offer and let's run with it". We call it... I suppose its structure-based approaches vs relationship-based approaches or remedial approaches against compensatory approaches, and these residencies have really been about trying to compensate for our youngsters and trying to really value what they've got to offer and what they've got to bring. Often we focus on

systems in school because systems are transferable and if a member of staff is off you haven't lost that relationship which means you've lost that connection. When a child changes class you can move the system a lot more easily than you can move the relationship. And when those young people are at home or in rest-bite or moving on into adult education, the system transfers very nicely. You write it down on a piece of paper, this is how you do this and you hand it over and there you go. And actually this completely turns that on its head, for want of a better phrase. It does turn it on its head, it makes you think, actually, we've got to begin from the young people, we've got to work on relationship, because relationship is powerful. Yes there's a place for structure, yes there's a place for system, but relationship is what humanity and creativity is all about. And so this was all about relationship and it was challenging for us, but great. It gave all the staff involved a first insight into the Sensory Atelier and the principles of Reggio Emilia, and I feel the Liz Clarke does live on in that everyone's still getting out the big bits of sponge and different things, but possibly what didn't happen as well as I would've liked, and I think that might be how I set the project off, was that other people that hadn't been involved in those early sessions didn't catch the bug. They just thought it was something that EYFS were doing, and year 3 were doing, and that it's nothing to do with me, I don't know what they're doing, but actually and I'm due to have the music room and it seems to be full of giant pieces of sponge [audience laughter]. So we did have a little bit of that and I think that was partly me and my communication, and so over the residencies I did get a bit better at that. So we did learn, or we were reminded, because we already know that children are capable of constructing their own learning. If you're not careful in a special school environment it's almost like every lesson is a performance of the teacher and the staff to the children, and the children can be somewhat passive recipients of whatever you've decided to prep. But it was about ok, no, these guys can construct, they can put things together, they can decided where they want their learning to go, and I think it really reminded us of that and that was really powerful. Also sharing things together, having contributions valued, talking, reflecting, both on a one-to-one where that was appropriate, and also more in groups. So we were reminded of that. We were reminded that our children are communicators, we do know that. In 2017 we were very fortunate to be named SEN setting of the year for communication, nationally, so we were very proud of that [applause]. Thank you! But it really caused us again to think what are we doing in every lesson? In every moment, to enable children to be heard, to enable children to express themselves, and to

have that valued and explored and not closed down and not fitted into a box. What were we doing to allow that to happen? And obviously in a school like ours that happens in lots of different ways.

And also we were reminded about the environment. We are very lucky, we are in a purpose-built school and we have got a lovely environment. But it goes beyond that. It's about looking for how we can create those fully immersive environments, really play-based environments, student-based environments where they can really learn and move things forward, and actually how we all - adults and children - love to play. Set out a room, give it some stuff, and we'll play, as long as nobody's looking that you think's going to find embarrassing, we'll all play. So it was great to see the children just being able to engage in their environments and it's challenged us to think more about our classrooms and our spaces and how we can be more creative within the beautiful new building that we've got.

What we learnt is that really simple resources can have powerful effects capable of engaging staff and children. We can forget that as grown-ups, as adults, that actually just a few bits of sponge and a bucket go a long way. And so it reminded us of those simple pleasures of a cardboard box, and it was great to just enjoy those things together.

It also helped us learn how easily we can create our own provocations for young people at using simple objects but also using our own playfulness and physicality. I think as adults we can forget that, we can think right I need to have prepped this and I need to have that organised, and I'll present this and then I'll do a role-play with this, and actually how simply humans have fun together, and get creative together and have special moments together. So we learnt a lot about that.

And I think as well we do do something that's called intensive interaction, which I'm sure most of you will have heard of, and Dave Hewitt. But that is all based on a young person's interest and then you joining them in that. This was slightly different. This was you giving a provocation. We're bringing you the provocation. Because our youngsters, without that, will tend to do the same things over and over again. Not because they're particularly enjoying them or because they don't want to do anything else, but because they haven't been able to

make that leap, to say hey I'm going to do something new today, I'm going to do something different. And so what it did for me is it made me realise, yeah intensive interaction's great, I can see a young person spinning a coat-hanger and I can go and join spinning the coat-hanger, and I can pause and I can wait and see if they notice, and they might do something and I might do something. But chances are it's always going to be the coat-hanger for that little person, unless I provide the provocation to something new and something different. And so for us it was about taking the principles of intensive interaction but giving it an adult provocation, an adult catalyst to bring the thing off.

Second two residencies I'm going to do really briefly. So they were much shorter in their duration, but they did give us opportunities to develop a series of lessons that ran before, during and after the residency to help us give us the context for the young people and to help them feel more confident. It also helped us to start to see how a Reggio approach can be applied across the curriculum, not necessarily just within the arts, but how we might go about applying it to science or applying it to other aspects of the curriculum. It also gave us opportunities to get formal recognition through the Arts Award, which was absolutely great, but it did highlight to us how much work we'd need to do without parents and carers to get them to engage with artistic opportunities outside of school. We ran one of the performances after school - The Boy That Bit Picasso - and we had loads of places, and we really struggled to get families to take us up on it. And it was a shame for me, it was a disappointment for me in a way, although the families that came had a brilliant time, I know if I could've got more families to engage with it they'd have absolutely love it. But I think our families sometimes decide, oh my child's not going to sit; my child's going to be crawling out; my child's not going to be able to manage this; oh it's a little bit late; hmmm we've got this and this to do. And so their priorities in their head are very different from the arts often, they're not thinking oh let's go to the theatre this evening, they're thinking how are we going to get to tomorrow morning in one piece.

And so I think we have got a lot of work to do with families about getting them engaged, but it has left us with a desire that each new stage of the project is going to leave a lasting legacy. It's not just going to be for the pupils and the staff that have been there, but it's been for everyone.

Amy, Arts Award, talk to us about that.

Amy - So after we did all of these workshops we decided we wanted something we'd be able to review it as a whole, so it was one of the ways we'd be able to share with the rest of the school what we've achieved, because like Abi said sometimes it was you got closed in a music room and they knew that there was mad stuff going on in there, they could hear the squealing and the sponges being thrown and foil getting ripped, and they didn't really know what was going on. So all the work that we've collected from The Boy That Bit Picasso and all the photographs from the Sensory Atelier with Liz, we gathered them all together and we made almost Ashmount's own art gallery, which we then invited the parents to and all the children in school, each class came and had a look at it themselves, And it just meant that for once they could review their work, which they don't often get to do in our SEN-based school and it meant that parents could come and review the work. The only time we get to do that is in a formal setting of a parents evening where they're not really getting to share that opportunity with their child. So it was lovely that they could come in, they could have a cup of tea, they had a look at all the work and then at the end there was a ceremony where each child that had been through the Arts Award as you can see got presented with their certificate, which was really nice to see.

Abi - I would say as well that something that surprised me was that just before I was trying to plan the day and see how many children we had in each presentation, and I noticed that the amount of permission slips we'd had back was really low, and I thought right I'm going to get the pupil contact list out myself and I'm going to ring every parent and say your child's done this, please come, please prioritise it, you can come at ten o'clock in the morning, you can come at half eleven or you can come at two o'clock, please try and come. Can we pick you up? Can we facilitate anything for you? And the thing that really got me when I made those phone calls was that a lot of the parents said, "I saw the letter in the bag but I didn't think for one minute that could've been my child". They didn't imagine that their child could've earned a certificate from Trinity College, they didn't think that that was going to be a possibility for their young person, and they thought they'd received the letter in error and it should've gone in a different child's bag. So that for me was a real glow moment, a real

magic moment, that yes it was a despairing moment but actually when those parents then came and watched their child on video and in the gallery it was absolutely magical for me, so that was really, really good.

Okay, preparation for year 2 I'm not going to talk about but it's on the slide and I'm sure they'll be available at some point, so that's there. Because we need to get these children speaking, super-duper!

So, let me hear from these children. Amy, do you want to ask these guys some questions about what's going on in these pictures?

Amy: yeah, so this was this year wasn't it guys, and instead of doing the Sensory Atelier we did something a bit different didn't we, and we did loads of different sorts of artwork didn't we, and we used lots of different materials. Can you name any from the top of your head? What do you think some are? We used some paint, didn't we? So this was our first one (slides being shown). What's that there that you can see?

- I'm making...

- It's like play-doh

- Play-doh?

- It is! And what...

- plasticine

- plasticine, that's right

- plasticine

Amy - So what did we do with the plasticine, Luke?

L - We put our fingers on it

Amy - We did, and we squished it really far apart, and did the colours come like that, Maisy?

M - No

Amy - No? So what did we do? What did we do to the colour?

L - We mixed up the colours actually

Amy - We did, that's right. And was it messy, Maisy?

M - No

Amy - No, it wasn't too messy this one, was it. So that was our first week, wasn't it, and that was only a short one.

L - How come that was only a short one? [Audience laughter]

Amy - And now this is where it got a bit crazy isn't it. So, right, Summer, what happened in this workshop?

S - We were doing lots of taping

Amy - We did. And did we put tape on a few bits of paper and then hang them up in the classroom?

S - No.

Amy - No. what did we do?

S - We put tape everywhere

Amy - Everywhere! Oh my word!

L - The grown-ups think it's funny

Amy - Well, if it was on their floor I bet they wouldn't, would they. So then, how many rolls do you think we used, Maisy?

M - a hundred?

Amy - A hundred. We must've used so many

L - Maybe even two hundred or three hundred! We need to count them when Sian's back

Amy - We do. And where did we put it? So we put it on the floor, didn't we? And, Summer, you seem to have a bit of tape that's not on the floor there. Where is it?

S - It's on my face.

Amy - It's on your face

[Audience laughter]

Amy - I think a lot of us had it on our face near the end of the day

L - How funny!

[Audience laughter]

Amy - Very funny.

L - Next!

Amy - Here we go. So, Maisy, what are they?

L - It's our drawing thing, we drawing things.

M - We're drawing patterns.

Amy - That's right we are drawing patterns.

L - We're drawing patterns.

Amy - So how did we make them Luke?

L - We did this.

Amy - Yeah we did, but what did we stick to those whisks there, Summer?

M - A CD

Amy - A CD, that's right Maisy.

S - Pens and a CD.

Amy - Yeah we did. And what happened when we turned them on?

S - They span around.

L - They span around like around, around, around.

Amy - And did they go fast? And did they fall over sometimes?

L - Hahaha, yeah

Amy - And did they get tangled sometimes, Maisy?

M - Yeah

Amy - Yes. But they looked fantastic didn't they at the end. And I know you enjoyed helping Brogan with that didn't you Luke?

L - Yeah I really love my best friend Brogan.

Amy - Yeah, and that's very nice because you're not in classes with her usually are you?

L - And I still like her anyway.

Amy - Right, now, was this a clean one?

Kids - no, no, messy

Amy - Messy

L - It's really, really messy!

Amy - What did we do? What did we use?

L - We used paint.

Amy - Paint. What did we do with the paint?

M - We put it on the table and...

L - We popped them in the plastic bags and mixed them all together. And mostly it's like...

Amy - And sometimes we mixed some brown colours didn't we. And what would happen if we were shaking the bag, sometimes? What happened, Summer, sometimes when we were shaking the bag to mix it?

S - It splats.

Amy - It splats, didn't it, but it was lots of fun wasn't it. And how dirty was the classroom at the end?

L - Very dirty!

Amy - How dirty were you, Maisy, at the end?

M - Very dirty.

Amy - Very dirty.

L - Even me.

Amy - Even you.

L - Right! Next!

Amy - Next, right, go on then Luke.

L - Next it's our greenhouse we're making. (I want some numberjacks all over it)

Amy - You did. What did you draw in our greenhouse, Maisy?

M - A dog.

Amy - A dog.

L - Woof, woof!

Amy - And what did you put on it Summer?

S - I put some people on it.

Amy - You did put some people on it. And what else did we put on it? So we did some drawing and then what else did we put on it? Let's have a look.

M - Tissue paper.

Amy - Tissue paper. And then, when we put it up, what did we put in our house? Did we put some plants in there?

S - No.

Amy - No? Did we put some plants in there, Maisy?

M - No.

- No? What did we put in our greenhouse when we were done then?

M - Umbrellas.

Amy - Umbrellas, didn't we?

S - We put all our decorations in there.

Amy - We did, so we had one of our very own small galleries, didn't we.

L - Yes we did.

Amy - And everyone could have a look at it couldn't they, which was really nice.

L - Yeah it was really, really nice! We should have Sian more often! Next, Abi!

Amy - Lovely.

L - That's me helping chatty, chatty Brogan.

Amy - That's right. So on our last session we did one again didn't we? And why did we do the tape one again?

L - To make it look more beautiful.

Amy - To make it look more beautiful. And what do you think Summer?

S - And we needed to use all the tape.

Amy - We needed to use all the tape.

L - How come?!

Amy - And what did we do this time which was different? We didn't just do it on the floor. Where else did we do it?

L - We did it on the tables.

Amy - Yeah. Where did we do it, Maisy?

M - Chairs.

Amy - Where else did we do it, Summer?

S - We did it in the playground.

L - Every. Even outside.

Amy - Yeah we did. Was the teacher very happy?

S - No.

Amy - Ohhhh, but it looked fantastic didn't it?

S - Yeah.

Amy - So we did it even bigger and better that time, didn't we?

S - Yeah.

L - Yeah, chatty Brogan was chatting away that time.

Amy - She did, she loved it didn't she.

L - Yeah. She loves me.

Amy - Right, so this was when we went on our gallery visit guys. Can you remember? So we came here didn't we? So girls, what are you two doing there?

M & S - We're looking at pictures.

Amy - Yeah, you were looking at the pictures of all the different art, weren't you? And we went and had an explore, downstairs. And then we did some art workshops didn't we.

M & S - Yeah.

Amy - Luke, what are you doing there? Can you remember that? What were you doing on that projector?

L - My number. My numbers.

- Yeah, so what happened when you put your numbers on the projector?

L - It lighted up on this wall.

Amy - Amazing. On the walls. And then what else did we do, Summer and Maisy? Can you remember?

M & S - We made faces.

Amy - Yes we did make faces. Why did we make faces? What did we do?

M & S - We tried to look different.

Amy - We did try to look different like the artist didn't we?

M & S - Yes.

Amy - And then we posed in front of our favourite picture didn't we.

M & S - Yeah.

Amy - So who's that under there?

M - Me.

Amy - Yes Maisy. Luke I thought that was you.

[Audience and Luke laughter]

L - That's Dino.

Abi - So, we are out of minutes. Adults, you can read that, that's our reflection, adult reflections. But I think it's most important that we hear from our young people. So, Summer, if you had something to say to these guys about Arts Award or about Lisa and Sian coming in, what would you say, do you think?

L - We should have her more often.

Abi -Yeah I'll come to you, Luke. What do you think Summer?

S - We should come here more often.

Abi -You think we should come here more often and spend more time in the gallery?

S - Yeah. Super.

Abi - Maisy, can you think of anything you want to tell these people before we've got to go for a drink?

M - Hmm, more often.

Abi - More often here? Or more often at school?

M - Here.

Abi - More often coming out here. So you guys like the gallery. And how about you Luke?

What do you want to tell these people?

L - We should always bring that chatty Brogan. [Audience laughter] I think she'll just love it!
Giggling.

Abi - And how about having an artist in school, Luke? What do you think about that?

L - It'll be really good!

Abi - Yeah, so we're really, really hoping that we're going to get this next phase of funding, and we're going to be able to take it to the next level. Because I think these guys have just got so much out of it. I wish you could've all just seen them there working in that gallery, it was absolutely stunning. There was only a few of us there, but it was magic.

So thank you very much, and sorry we've taken you slightly over your break.

END