

## **Sensory Journeys Symposium**

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

**14:00 – 17:00**

### **Attenborough Arts Centre**

Marianne Pape, Education and Outreach Officer

So, hello everyone, my name is Marianne Pape, and I'm the Education and Outreach Officer here at Attenborough Arts Centre. I'm delighted to welcome you all here today to celebrate and share the adventures we've been on for the last two years with some wonderful children, artists, teachers and colleagues here at Attenborough Arts Centre, and also Two SEN Schools in Leicestershire. I'll be giving you an overview of the project: Unlocking the world through art: A Sensory Atelier; how it came about; what we did to develop this new way of working for us and for our partner schools; and what we've learnt and adapted along the way in this testing phase; and what makes this programme different to others we've done before.

Just to give you a little background about our Learning and Outreach programme and team at AAC. We have 4 part time staff designing and producing great cultural programmes with schools, families, communities, partners and localities to engage people in great quality transformational arts experiences, with a person-centred approach, making our venue and programme open to everybody. Last year the Learning team ran 938 sessions with eleven and a half thousand participants from across the region, targeting schools with high widening participation targets; working with elective home educated young people, worked with 23 mainstream and SEN schools, achieving 55 Arts Awards and 4 new Artsmark partner schools. We have a fantastic gallery learning programme and dedicated strands of work for families and early years – ensuring everyone can engage with high quality cultural experiences at the University of Leicester and Attenborough Arts Centre. Our Learning and Outreach programme is all externally funded from a small ACE NPO match, with grants currently from Paul Hamlyn Foundation; BBC Children in Need and the Princes Foundation for Children and the Arts and small pots from trusts and foundations. We are so grateful to Paul Hamlyn Foundation for enabling us to test and explore this enquiry and child-led programme, and I'm delighted to share the seeds of this

journey with you today.

So the genesis for this project... I'm just going to talk about the project I was doing with Ellesmere a little while ago, a few years ago, called Pop-Up Canal, which was part of our place-based learning enquiry, as part of The City Classroom pilot. It was a fantastic project, exploring how we can work with a SEN school and local assets in the community, and to unlock learning for children, and it was a really new way of working for us and for the school, and we encountered so many experiences and moments throughout that project. As we were reviewing the work that had happened over the course of that work, I was chatting to Simon Copey, who was part of the senior learning team at the time, and he said that the programme had unlocked the world through the arts for his children in his school, and he found that the arts were a tool for enabling children with complex needs to learn in a non-linear way, new methods to explore the world and their personal, social and physical development. So then I had my own breakthrough – or glow moment – and wondered how much the school would benefit from drawing from some key principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, beyond its early years focus and adapt and apply aspects of this in an SEN school setting, responding to formal curriculum cornerstones. The model developed by Reggio Children considers children with complex needs, as Children with Special Rights, celebrating the unique ways they can tell us about the world from the way they experience it, and how we all benefit from that. We began a dialogue with Reggio Children, based at the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre, and their UK partner Sightlines, to explore where our emergent pedagogies overlap and stand alone in our Sensory Atelier approach.

The following slides (powerpoint) give you an idea of the range of activity and engagement that we have been exploring - from training for teachers, how we have developed the arts as a tool for learning, to breakthrough moments for all involved.

So the background for the project: Unlocking the World Through Art, is a two year Paul Hamlyn Funded Explore and Test programme, that explores a Sensory Atelier; which literally translates from Italian as a studio space or workshop. We wanted to create tailored space (physical, creative and time based) and processes for children with a spectrum of learning differences, communication difficulties and disabilities including: ASD (Autism

Spectrum Disorder) and PMLD (Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties) all those that attend at the SEN schools in Leicester & Leicestershire. We aimed to address the physical and curricular barriers to the arts and learning, using collaborative, kinaesthetic and multisensory embodiment approaches to develop communication skills and support children's connections with the world. This included our galleries and how contemporary art could be part of this journey.

In 2015 we were commissioned by The Mighty Creatives, in partnership with the University of Leicester, to research the impact the cuts to arts services in the East Midlands were having for disabled children and young people. Our report 'Disabled children and young people: Engagement in the Arts and Culture in the East Midlands, 2015', found that in an environment of restrained resources that the cuts were having a disproportionate impact on disabled children and young people's access to the arts. There was, and still is, a strong need for this work. Together with further decline and devaluing of arts subjects in schools, we know that children from SEN schools are in the most need of access to quality arts enrichment. There are 6.8% primary school children and 21.9% secondary children registered as SEN in Leicester which equates to just under 10,000 children and young people. We spoke to them all. We spoke to loads. We consulted with SEN schools, teachers, artists and pupils and their families, to respond to this and to design this programme.

We are delighted to have partnered with Ellesmere College in the city of Leicester, and Ashmount School, in the rural county to deliver this Explore and Test project. Both schools had just moved into brand new buildings, thanks to the Building Schools for the Future programme. They already had a great dialogue between themselves, and we all felt the Sensory Atelier would provide space for staff training, sharing best practice, creative problem solving and a safe space to learn and progress together. Ellesmere College has primary, secondary and post 16 departments and caters for the needs of 270 students between the ages of 4 - 19 with a wide range of educational difficulties from moderate to severe and complex needs. Some students have additional sensory, autistic or speech, language and communication needs. All providing a unique perspective on the world. Ashmount is a special school for pupils for the ages of 4 and 19 makes provision for 150 pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe and additional learning

difficulties, autism spectrum disorder and visual impairments. A significant number of pupils also have additional complex medical needs. And again, they provide a unique perspective on the world.

So for the theory for our programme. From our research and consultation we know that SEN schools in particular are concerned with the changing curriculum and marginalisation of creative subjects; and they're in need of new ways to enable their students to achieve and learn. The recent Rochford Review freed up schools to explore their own ways to evidence learning for students with SEND but gave limited frameworks for how to do this – which is where our programmes have been so valuable. We know that children with SEND do not necessarily learn in a linear, logical cognitive way, and the arts present a tool for enabling a multifaceted approach to learning that engages children, wherever their starting point is, and whatever their learning styles or differences might be.

Our Sensory Atelier approach gives the role of teachers, support assistants and children to explore processes, themes, ideas and material's to develop a creative dialogue and to learn from the space between art, participant and place. It is has also been an opportunity to develop new ways of evidencing and measuring wellbeing, learning and engagement for children with SEND in a non-linear learning environment. These include new tools to clearly document and evidence the impact of the workshops, including for example finding more and more accessible ways to evidence Arts Award.

So our methodology. Our Sensory Atelier methodology explores the gallery and classrooms as studios, where teachers and support assistants become learning curators; pupils as creative collaborators; and artists as Atelierista's, however the boundaries can be blurred and roles are merged with the focus on child-led learning and on the process.

Our founding project manager (Manya Benenson) had studied the Reggio Emilia technique together with artists that use elements of the approach in their work. Manya delivered INSET (IN-SERVICE Training day) and CPD (Continuing Professional Development) sessions to the staff of the schools to ensure an understanding of the methodology from the outset. We now know the need for this is ongoing, and we are still at the beginning of this transformative pedagogy for the partnership.

New systems and templates were applied so that teachers could evidence and measure the learning taking place through this work with extensive documentation processes that aligned with augmented systems they were already using to try and streamline content collation. For the teachers we used a self-assessment summative and formative evaluation using a sliding scale, measuring their experience, knowledge, relationship, confidence and communication. Monitoring and analysis of these responses throughout the project was critical to evidencing the learning of the staff and identify where support was needed.

We used the Leuven Scale for pupils as a measurement for well-being and involvement, the rationale being “that high levels of well-being and involvement lead in the end to high levels of child development and deep level learning”. Extensive documentation to capture and record evidence of pupil engagement and their learning ensuring to evidence the change brought about through this work, this included: Observation, anecdotal evidence, photography, filming, reflection, discussion, conversation and non-verbal communication methods with children with the most complex learning disabilities such as Makaton imagery, eye recognition devices (eye gaze computer) and closed questioning for those with restricted movement. The additional role of the observer has been key.

We are also interested to find out the artistic and learning benefits for artists working with children with SEND. We worked with artists to develop their own inclusive approaches, to make their work more accessible for schools and enable children with SEND to inform that process. Dance4, an internationally recognised experimental dance organisation and regional dance development agency with a track record in championing disability projects, worked with us to co-commission artist Gabi Reuter and support her adapt and develop her practice for outreach with SEN schools.

We worked with key artists and companies that bring their own key inclusive specialisms and explored their practice as Atelierista’s in a SEN school setting, which included artists shadowing and mentoring as another key outcome from our Sensory Atelier. We programmed a series of residencies with varying structures, delivered by artists and companies (who were co-selected by AAC, the schools and the children), to work with teachers and pupils, devising new engagement strategies through a range of art forms and

techniques.

These included: Dance and physics of movement with Gabi Reuter, in partnership with Dance4; Immersive theatre with Bamboozle Theatre company, who are specialists in theatre for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities; Improvisation / movement / dance with Turned on its Head and Liz Clark, exploring sensory learning and integrating vestibular input on auditory processing for children with SEND (Vestibular Input “coordinates movements of the eyes, head and body” which affects our body’s balance, muscle tone, visual-spatial perception, auditory-language perception and emotional security); Visual artist Sian Watson Taylor exploring kinaesthetic and sensory learning. The traces of this participation and coproduction are beautifully displayed in our Gallery 3 for the rest of this month, I would really invite you all to go and check it out (10- 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018).

We also programmed one-off theatre performances and workshops related to the AAC programme, in the school settings, ensuring they were presented as accessibly as possible and wellbeing indicators followed up from those engagements. Tailored visits to Attenborough Arts Centre galleries and workshops were also really, really phenomenal. The images here that you'll see throughout the presentation (children pointing and sitting), are a particular type of documentation which doesn't necessarily capture where some of the most significant learning that took place - game play was not always documented. The 'spaces between' were often where the magic happened and my colleagues will discuss that in the next section (following presentations).

A key aspect of the Reggio Emilia approach is to document and share the work produced as it emerges, so children can reflect and reengage with the work at different times, and this has been significant for this project. We display this around the schools to help with reflection, enquiry and memory. We also formally share the work through exhibitions at the gallery and at school to enable parents to see what has happened during these residences. As much of the Sensory Atelier work takes place in and out of the classroom, access is sometimes limited to only those who use that room - and therefore we encourage celebration of sharing, to leave a trace of a happening for others to wonder. Both schools have become Artsmark schools and are on their journey with the Sensory

Atelier project being the heart of their Artsmark statements of commitment. Hazel (Townsend from The Mighty Creatives) will be discussing this later, how the Artsmark is so phenomenal. We also aim for all pupils that are participants in this project to have completed an Arts Award ranging from Discover through to Bronze.

So our analysis of the project. We are nearly at the end of two years of enquiry. We are now gathering all the evidence, the quantitative and qualitative data, and are entering into our full evaluation process to ascertain the full picture of how this approach has had an effect on all of those that have been involved. We are told of those 'goose bump' moments as the school termed them, the 'glow' moments as they are called (Maggie MacLure et al 2010) - the transformational effect from these engagements. The schools tell us how the behaviour of the pupils change in the sessions, their focus and concentration increased. Their expectations of behaviour in the pupils is questioned when the pupils behave differently than predicted. More of these examples will be shared by colleagues shortly.

However what we have evidenced and seen so far clearly indicates the positive effect of the Sensory Atelier and how it can open possibilities to significant personal and social development for the pupils and a positive impact on staff, artists and partners.

We still feel this is very much early days in our work – there is still so much to explore, but the impact, resonance and need for this work is clear. So we are currently working on the next funding application to develop this project further, to work with partners, to explore a deeper understanding of the ethos of Reggio Emilia and how we can draw upon aspects relevant to our cohort of students here in the East Midlands, and to work together with artists, staff, pupils, families, cultural partners as a whole community.

I'd just like to specially thank Lisa and Manya, and all the children – thank you guys – artists, teachers, the whole school communities for enabling this adventure to happen.

Please look at our blog and share your thoughts with us as we continue on our Sensory Atelier Journey. <https://unlockingtheworldblog.wordpress.com/performances>

Thank you.

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