

## **Sensory Journeys Symposium**

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

**14:00 – 17:00**

### **Project managers in discussion, Attenborough Arts Centre**

Lisa Jacques, Schools and Projects Co-ordinator, (July 2017 – March 2018)

Manya Benenson, Schools and Projects Co-ordinator, (April 2016 – June 2017)

Interviewer (Lisa Jacques) – So I'd like to introduce you to Manya Benenson, who was the project manager from the outset of this project for about 18 months I think? Yeah?

### **Manya – Just under.**

Lisa – And as I said before I came into the project a little bit later on, did the last sort of five months and I forever got “oh you're the new Manya” constantly. So it's really lovely to have met Manya previous to this discussion and just realise how amazing an effect you've had on the project and how amazing it's been delivered. So, we've put a few questions together that will hopefully break down the two years of the project. Just more as a discussion point, because quite a lot of things come up and we can go off on a bit of a tangent I think sometimes during presenting, and that's where the interesting things start to happen, much the same as... that's quite reflective of the actual project where it goes off at a tangent, and that's where the interesting things are. I think Marianne (Pape) referenced those spaces in between, and that's really those transformational moments as well. So Manya, okay, can you just describe... because when I came to the project, the delivery was something that I'm familiar with and, for me, it was trying to find what was the heart of the project. So I found it, I know what it is now. I struggled at first I think to see how this project was so transformational for the pupils, and I had to get in the school to actually see that. So, could you just describe to us what you believe the heart of the project is?

**M – That's a great question. I think I'll go back to what Marianne was saying in the presentation, that I knew about Reggio Emilia and I started this project by doing some INSET in the schools. And I can remember going into the schools right when the project first began, and telling everybody as the main project was about to start**

and what it was going to involve and seeing a lot of faces look a bit blankly at me and.. it needed to happen and I... it was great to start with some INSET and it was great to talk about it bit, it's very theoretical, and when you say you didn't know what the heart was, I'm not sure I did, and I'm not sure any of us did. The project needed to begin and the residencies needed to start happening, and we needed to learn along the way. And so for me, the heart of this project was the opportunity to be learning alongside the children and let the children become the leaders and for us to sit back and watch as the children led, in these amazingly different, and each residency and each opportunity was very different. But what I think linked to all of them was the opportunity for the children to lead the creative practice, and the artist to be stimulating and provoking these opportunities with such a wonderful range of different media for us to go on this journey together. And it wasn't until it happened that I think... so by the time you came in post, I think that was galvanising. I don't think the heart was there right at the beginning, it needed to start. For me, the heart of it was the opportunity for the children to become the leader and for us to be the followers.

L – Okay, so we're talking about child-initiated learning there, and child-led learning, but for the effect it had on the... sort of going off-piste a little bit... but the effect it had on the teaching staff, support assistants, the Attenborough staff, the office staff, you know, the impact there? Do you think that it actually filtered through, throughout the school?

M – Yeah, I mean it would be really interesting to hear the schools perspective at the moment, but I feel it did start filtering through. I feel that there was lots around confidence, and I remember in the early residencies teachers saying “I'm not used to letting go, I'm not used to coming in without a lesson plan and this being okay. Is it really okay?” And there being lots of confidence to let go, and to see it happen. But as that spread across the schools... and we started in the early years of those schools, so I think there was a bit in the upper schools, of the schools not really feeling it in the early days, and that's why it needs to be a long process because the upper schools weren't really getting much of the practice in the start of it. But it did start to filter through. It certainly filtered through here as we started welcoming the schools, and I think I'm right in saying those schools were nervous about coming to

the first exhibitions and what it was going to be like, and then we made these termly visits, and they started working better and better, and we got better at how we could support the visits and make more of the visits. We got cleverer at how we were going to programme the work, and I'll talk a bit because I think there's a specific question about the third residency culminating a lot of our learning from the first two residencies. So yes, I think it did filter more and more but I think as Marianne said it's only just beginning and it's filtered a long way but it's got longer to filter.

L – Okay, so one of the Reggio Emilia styles is to have a trained artist within the school and Atelierista. So how do you think what difference has that had on the pupils having a trained artist in there rather than an art teacher?

M – Well it would be really interesting to hear from the children at the moment what difference they think it had. I think that one of the things was really fundamental is the difference in materials, just... because I wasn't here for the third residency. Seeing some of the materials that Sian's introduced, and some of them being things that we are familiar with such as plasticine, but the way she's used them and what she's got out of the children and the way she's worked with those materials I think was very stimulating for the children but also gave the teachers new ideas which they're now using in the classroom. The dance and movement, and the approaches Liz Clarke used in Turned On Its Head were very simple and low-cost materials but allowed a totally different type of creative movement and play that the teachers haven't seen before. Which has now resulted in both schools having their kit of sponges, of cardboard, of shiny material, which they can bring out. And they're using spaces in different ways. So I think if you ask the difference about an artist and art teacher, it's about the way they're using materials and they approach that they're using. And, going back to the Reggio Emilia approach, it's about that curiosity and creative provocation that excites and interests children that isn't directing the play or the exploration in a linear fashion. It's saying, it's open and all things are possible, and we will look at those fascinations and those interests of those children and we'll develop that further, and I think that's where our artists were very skilled, at seeing what those were. But working very closely with the teaching teams and saying “what are you noticing? What's happening here?” And

**the skill was developing residencies which responded to those children's individual interests and growing them, and growing them as big and as wide as they possible could. And the opportunity to bring them here to the Attenborough Arts in the middle of those residencies grew it even wider again.**

L – So that goes back to you saying about the heart being child-led and child-initiated so the structure that an artist brought was more open and allowed more creativity in the sense of more individuality for the pupils, whereas maybe the schools, and I say this because I've heard it mentioned from the teachers, that they're very much focused.. and you mentioned a lesson plan, et cetera, et cetera. So that's the difference that you see there. So this is a bit controversial, seeing as we've got TMC (The Mighty Creatives) in the room as well. What makes it different to previous iterations of placing artists in schools, such as the Creative Partnerships model?

**M – I think it's different in the sense that it was an open-ended adventure that we were going on together. We are testing and we were exploring ideas. It was rarely theme-based, although it drew on the curriculum and there are things which link to the curriculum, it didn't have... this is... we are doing Egyptians through art. It was very... I'm not saying the creative partnerships were those things, but it lost itself in its own theory and practice and it was the exploration in its openness sense. We didn't set out to say “we're going to start here and we're going to end here”, it was a journey that we went on, we hopefully went on it together, and it was a journey which at all times we were finding out from each other, and learning from each other which ways it was going to go, which Creative Partnerships was also, but I think drawing Reggio Emilia and drawing on those practices allowed us to go on a journey that had a different route and wasn't set out in the first place. And most of the beautiful moments were often the happy accidents and the things that we hadn't predicted were going to happen, and being open to those. And, I think, that schools are under huge amounts of pressure to moving on to next thing and the next thing, and what hopefully this project allowed is a bit more breathing space and time to look back. And as Marianne talked about, the role of the observer to give us that opportunity to really think about what it meant for individual students or individual teachers, and how we were going to learn and develop the next part of it.**

L – I think that's a really nice phrase you used, you said it loses itself, and I think it was very immersive, not only for the teachers but also for the pupils from the experiences that I had on the last residency. It was almost as if they forgot they were at school, it was so immersive, and they were so interested in it. And that's for all the staff as well as the pupils. And you spoke about everyone being equal, which is really sort of a co-construction method of pedagogy, really that was sort of prevailing for the whole project, that we are all learning from each other. And it's quite interesting that you picked up on that, as one of the strengths of the project.

So there were different models of approach and different outcomes for each residency, so some of the residencies were for a week, two weeks, we had some drop in shows, plus workshops. There was a workshop method, consultancy method. There was also the ten-week residency, which was the last one. So there was lots of different models of approach. So, is there something that you could just... because you touched on it earlier, about different approaches with the different schools, potentially?

**M – I think we had... Bamboozle Theatre company work with both schools but in quite different ways and we built in sessions where the artist could plan with the schools, and at that point the school said actually it would work better for us this way, and at Ashmount we had a residency model of working, which meant that it was much more intense and programmed over two weeks. And at Ellesmere it lasted longer and was called the consultancy model which was where there was activity one day a week and there was breakout with teachers in the afternoon, which was hard for Ashmount to programme that model. And I think it was hard, in your case as well at Ellesmere, but you made it happen somehow. And that's really interesting, and there were different outcomes from that. I think the children got really immersed in it, and I'd be really interested what the schools say, but from my point of view the school that had the residency model at Ashmount, it was very immersive, it was really, really involving for those students. It was a really incredible experience, but it was over very fast and it was hard to capture some of the wonder in lasting way, whereas the outcomes at Ellesmere and having that opportunity to breakout and talk with teachers, certainly some of the teachers that came aboard for that consultancy model hadn't had any other part of the project and were nervous about**

how it would be. But they had really big journeys through having that opportunity which teachers rarely get, to talk to the artist, to talk about the approach, to talk about different ways of approaching something. The teachers were in role, which they were also at Ashmount, but they had longer to get into role and to try those things. So both had plusses, and that total immersion of a residency that happens was incredible, but I think we learnt quite a lot about spreading something out and the impact that that would have on teachers, and the opportunity to reflect with teachers. But one of the most fundamental things across both of them was this starting to use spaces in different ways, and at Ashmount it was the music group, and at Ellesmere it was the small hall, which I think I'm right in saying, at Ellesmere it was used as an extension to the dining room largely, before the project began, and it now became this most amazing creative space where all sorts of things happened: immersive theatre, dance, microphones, visual arts. And seeing those spaces used in different ways was definitely a hope for the project but I don't think we could've seen how much that was going to happen.

L - And I think when you mentioned the different models, but from the same... so Bamboozle Theatre, that's quite interesting that you've got an artist or company that can be adaptable in its approach depending on the schools that it's working with. We've seen that very much with Sian's residency, which was the visual arts residency, very much she worked with children from age 5 to 19, but it was the same workshop, and how the artist adapted that for the different needs of each pupil but also for the different age range, and I thought that was quite interesting, so how the artists are flexible, the artists that have been selected, and they've delivered. So I think that's been really helpful as well, and it's unfortunate that we haven't got any here today. It would be interesting to hear that perspective.

M – Just going back to what you were saying about using a range of different programming... I think that, because it was an Explore and Test project, it was so useful to be able to put lots of different models of creative interaction in the place, and including the one-off performances because, as I was saying, there was times earlier in the project where some pupils and teachers in school had heard all this and been to INSETs but had had very little impact with their classes and their pupils.

**So actually to be able to say “actually tonight there's going to be a performance, everybody's welcome”, and so I think within a project, whilst I believe the third residency was the residency that got it most right, which we'll come to in a moment, I think having a range of different approaches so the schools can really feel that lots of different things are happening and that they can engage on lots of different levels was useful.**

L – It's quite interesting that you were saying everyone's welcome, it's part of the philosophy of Reggio is that ethos, that everyone's involved so it goes beyond the classroom, it goes through as I mentioned earlier to the office staff, through to the dinner supervisors, through to parents and community. And that's something that has only really been touched on this project that we've worked out from the evaluation, and it's something that we're going to try and build a little bit more for the future. So having said all of that as well, that we've evaluated, now there's been some challenges to the project because there's no project without challenges and I think that's how we all learn, it's how we move forward. So it would be interesting to hear of some challenges that resolved in a positive way or not necessarily that, but particular challenges for you as a project manager, for the artists, for potentially the schools.

**M – I think for the schools they're under so much pressure, there's so much for them to do, and they weren't located very close to each other. So I think we visualised at the beginning that there would be lots of opportunities to share CPD, to share practice for things to happen, but actually, logistically that wasn't as possible as we'd hoped. And one of the best happy accidents happened quite recently just before I'd finished which was us interviewing artists for the third residency. We very much wanted the children to be involved in the selection of the artists and to be on the panel, and for the artists to do workshops with the children. And Ellesmere brought staff and pupils over to Ashmount and Ashmount hosted, and we had this wonderful day where they took part in workshops but actually some real friendships developed over that day. And seeing the children respond to each other and become, by the end, this wonderful cohort, together, this workshop cohort, and supportive of each other made us realise we've got to build this in more, and that was one of the things that went best about the third residency... Sian**

**divided her week and it was simultaneous, whereas in all of the other residencies it had been consecutive. Sian was now spending two days with one school and then two days with another school, and I think that helped have that cross-pollination make it even stronger because she was able to directly reflect (you'll be able to talk about more of this more because obviously this was the one that you were in post for), but I hope that meant that there were lots of opportunities for her to bring the practice from both schools and bring it together and reflect.**

L – I think there was opportunity for her practice, so she almost...so she would have two lessons a day for four days, so two days at Ellesmere and two days at Ashmount, and was trying out the workshops, and the way that they would morph and develop by the end of the week would sometimes be very different to how they started. But I think that's the nature of the project and working with specialist schools, that you go in with a plan and it does morph into something else because if we're looking at child-initiated and child-led learning, that's what happens. And just coming back to the previous point about those artists being flexible and being able to support that, and the difference you said between the teachers and the artists, there's the Atelierista as well, so it all sort of ties together with that. So yes, I think there was a connection there with the two schools, it didn't however allow the pupils to cross over, which is what we wanted, because obviously a lot of things when you write a project you want to happen, and actually practically it doesn't get there. But again, that's in the pipeline for the future, but definitely with the content of the workshops it did develop because of that going between the two schools.

**M – I think another challenge was Arts Award, at the beginning. Giving that to teachers on top of what was already a huge workload, certainly I think for everyone it felt like a really big extra, and we worked together to try and resolve how we could make that work, how we could streamline. That took the dedication of some very dedicated teachers, some of whom are here today, to see how we could make that work. Because Arts Award does fit very well Reggio Emilia's principles of extending the learning, having opportunities to reflect on what you've done, seeing yourself in the learning. So there was a link, but it was how to make that a smooth link and how to create opportunities that didn't jar, that didn't feel like lots of extra work for teachers, and I think we got there, or are getting there. But it certainly was**

## **challenging at the beginning.**

L – As I said with the last residency we've got, hoping to get 96 pupils through their Arts Award from Discover to Bronze, so I think it has had an impact. So I'm going to move on because we're running out of time.

So I think one of the things for me, I hadn't work with SEN pupils before, I hadn't worked in SEN schools before, but I had a 25-year background of education with FE and HE, and also within the arts and museums sector, so it's quite ironic that I hadn't actually worked in specialist schools, so for me this was a big challenge. And one of the things that hit me straight away was the funding implication, the budget implications that there are, working with specialist schools. So how was that considered in the project? Because the travel getting here, travel anywhere, the amount of staff that have to come and support the pupils. I was talking with our funder and had to explain it to them that the cost of a workshop in an SEN school is probably 3 times as much as it would be in a mainstream school. And this for you to reference, they obviously said highlight that in your funding application because the budget implications are huge. So how is that managed?

**M – Well, a lot of in kind from schools to put in extra staff, and both principles that are here today made sure that extra staff were made available. I'm sure there was a lot of budgetary impact on that but that was because you could see the benefits of the project, they put in extra staff, extra staff time. We did the same from our side and when the children came on gallery visits here, we made sure there was additional staff, as many people as we could provide to support the visits, where they're providing extra breakout spaces, making sure the time and how you programme the work allows for that. And I think you're absolutely right, you just have to make sure that you're programming extra people and time and resource, to make sure it's as adaptable as it possible can. But inevitably that does have an impact on a budget.**

L – Yeah, I think was just a bit woah, when I first came... So I am going to move on. So this was called Paul Hamlyn Explore & Test Project. So because it was funded, we have to formally produce an evaluation to ensure we've spent the money well and how we've done it. So we have to have quite robust documentation methods. And I know you touched on it

earlier, well Marianne touched on it earlier about some of those methods and evaluation strategies and how we measured learning, that personal, social development. So could you just go into that a little bit more about how the learning was documented and measured, not only for the pupils but also for the staff?

**M – Well we just did a lot of different things and I was slightly dreading you having to look through them, millions of different reams of things which we'd gathered. I think it being Explore and Test we needed to try lots of different evaluation methods. Some of them were more right in some settings and less right in other, so I'm really glad that we had lots of it, and sometimes the most important thing was having that observer in the room, who noted something or saw something and was able to document it. We did some audio recording, we did some filming, and we also had an amazing student in her third year at DMU, a photography student who did some amazing photography of the children's learning and the journeys that they went through and that was an incredible thing. So sometimes it was those moments that were captured in a range of ways, or the observer being able to note down something that was significant, but then we also tried a range of different approaches. Marianne talked about the Leuven Scale, which looks at the levels of involvement in the session. That really worked I think in the early year's workshops because we could really monitor how involved somebody was, and there involvement was really interesting. Sometimes it would go high, high, and you'd think they're going on this curve and they're going to stay there, but then it would drop, drop back down. But it gave another eye to observing pupils in that more "what is actually happening here?" And often we're so taken up with what we're doing we don't get a chance to step back and watch what's happening. So the Leuven Scale was really interesting. The baseline evaluative methods were really interesting, looking at where teachers have started, and where their confidence is, and what they're interested in and what they feel about creative learning is at the beginning of the project, but then taking it at various test points and having discussions and looking at it again was really interesting. Teachers' feedback as well as parent's feedback. The exhibition that we had at Ashmount and getting the feedback from parents was really, really important and significant. Those conversations that we had with parents that day, and talking about the impact on**

**their children and what they'd noticed was really significant, as well as the other methods that you were talking about in terms of their personal learning plans. I think the Arts Awards in themselves also create a part of the picture, as Marianne said. Maybe not the whole picture, but they are part of the picture. So yes, we just threw lots at it, basically, and the artists own feedback was hugely important, and they filled out really robust feedback for each session so we could really look at what was happening and were very giving with their time in feeding into that process.**

L – Well I think we're going to have to end there as we're running out of time, so thank you ever so much, I could go on forever.

END