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INTRODUCTION

Aim of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of *The Fantastic Attic* project. In order to do this as much feedback material as possible has been gathered from all those involved. The information has been sought using documentation made during the project, feedback response forms and meetings and discussions with all the relevant individuals and organisations. These were; artists, stewards, the museum, the project co-ordinator, parents, children, project administration, and early years settings.

A selection of relevant information has been compiled to provide an accurate and honest reflection of the project.

The evaluation will be available to all those who were involved in the project, any other interested parties, funders of the event and possible future funding bodies.

This evaluation will provide the means to identify areas for improvement in order to inform future work as well as to identify the successful aspects of the project.

Project history

In June 2000, a four-week creative event for pre-school children took place at the Great Hall of Newcastle Discovery Museum.

Artists and trainee teachers worked with visiting groups of children within an extensive, specially assembled studio and investigative space, mixing resources with constructions designed to encourage children and teachers to develop new experiences, reflections and inspirations.

The Fantastic Attic project was informed and developed out of pilot events carried out in 1997, by The Sightlines Initiative in partnership with Newcastle Early Years' service and BAECE. The pilot events took place at the Discovery Museum Newcastle and in Tyneside pre-schools. These occurred in conjunction with the first showing in England of Reggio Emilia's major exhibition on young children's potential and creativity called *The Hundred Languages of Children*

The pilot event offered children the opportunity to explore ideas, space and materials freely.

" The potential benefit of a sustained experience was obvious, giving children the time and opportunity to work past the feelings of novelty, wonder and excitement, and actually use the studio as a resource in which to develop and exchange their own ideas." (Robin Duckett - The Sightlines Initiative - Project co-ordinator.)

Project instigation and development

The Sightlines Initiative was formed in 1995 and is a Newcastle based voluntary early years' professional development initiative. Its aim is to promote significant, achievable advance in creative early childhood practice and it receives financial administration from Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council (GVOC).

Northern Rock Foundation and Arts Lottery funded the Fantastic Attic project.

Brief intent & description

The Fantastic Attic project was designed to be a learning experience and to provide significant training and practice development for practitioners, in a field which recent conferences and audits have identified as lacking in consistent, informed expertise. The key attitudes underpinning the project were to encourage and challenge children to conceptualise their experiences through individual and group reflection and to enact their experiences using many different representational languages. The project was to serve as a capacity building function, to encourage staff and parents (of the participating groups) to consider new ways of working in supporting the development of their children's creativity, communication and expression.

The learning process for adults as well as the children is seen as a critical aspect for the ongoing development of ideas, understanding and future projects.

The participating groups who visited *The Fantastic Attic* were offered 2 half day visits. The purpose of the first visit being to engage in a general exploration of the new and surprising environment designed to intrigue, engage and provoke ideas thoughts and feelings. This first session also gave *The Fantastic Attic* artists and guides the opportunity to meet the groups and develop relationships and an understanding of their interests discoveries and enthusiasms. During this first visit the staff were aware of the need to identify the particular interests and enthusiasms of the children in order to find ways in which they might imaginatively engage with and develop them for the groups second visit. The purpose of the second visit was to further develop ideas and interests and to foster reflective, creative practice between the artists and educators, and build and sustain a relationship with the children.



During both the first and second visits the artists and guides documented the process through photographs, working process notes, transcriptions of dialogue, etc. This documentation was used for reflection purposes as well as to inform this evaluation and is available upon request.

The Fantastic Attic project was designed and co-ordinated by Robin Duckett (Sightlines Initiative). Artists and students facilitated the project. Each half day session was run by a small team comprising of a professional artist with experience in working with young children and in supporting children as artists themselves, and up to three trainee teachers on University of Northumbria's B.Ed. course.

Nineteen playgroups and nurseries attended *The Fantastic Attic*. Many of these groups visited several times bringing different groups of children. There were fifty half day sessions made available to participating groups out of which forty-six sessions were booked and attended. The facility was also open to young children and their parents during the four weekends, and were advertised through regional museum and art listings.

Artists working on the project with the help of technical and construction experts created *The Fantastic Attic* space. The Great Hall of Newcastle Discovery Museum was divided by panelled sections to create many different areas all offering different stimulus and environments for creative exploration and play: -

- ❖ **Art studio:** Extensive space brimming with interesting and unusual art materials.
- ❖ **Construction area:** Space filled with boxes, tubing, dens, bamboo constructions, drapes, string, crawl-through areas e.t.c.
- ❖ **Dressing up area:** Space filled with a wide range of dressing up clothes, and also mirrors, screens, face-paints, jewellery e.t.c.
- ❖ **Mirror room:** A small white area filled with soft cushions and rugs (all white) with mirror balls and crystals hanging down and spotlights (as well as natural light) to create reflections.
- ❖ **Sound area:** Space filled with hanging chimes, pots and pans, home made drums, carpet tubes, sticks, spoons, funnels e.t.c.
- ❖ **Shadow space:** Space containing a very large shadow screen (with access on stage behind screen) with dance/performance area in front of screen and seating area at edge.
- ❖ **Community space:** A round room in the centre of the Great Hall topped with a silk parachute. This space filled with soft/tactile cushions and rugs and other small tactile objects
- ❖ **Light boxes:** Specially constructed light boxes including shelves to store small objects to be placed on light boxes (glass stones, pebbles, shells, feathers, coloured acetate shapes, gems, glass bowls e.t.c.)
- ❖ **Projection area:** Over head projector with wide selection of small objects (same as above) which could be placed on projector for interesting effects. Also, screen to project images onto with seating behind.

(See Appendix 1 for layout plan)

THE ROLE OF ARTISTS

The role of the artists involved was to welcome the children and encourage them to explore the environment freely. The artists were to provide the opportunities for the children to engage in a variety of stimulating and imaginative activities. However, the artists were not expected to lead these activities, but simply to provide the opportunities for the children to explore. The emphasis was on child initiated learning. The project gave children the chance to have some control over their own learning, and to express their interests and imagination without being 'directed' by adults. *The Fantastic Attic* project was influenced by the approach of the Reggio Emilia pre-schools. The Reggio approach specifies that it is necessary 'to understand the child as rich and competent, a co-creator of knowledge researcher actively engaged in making meaning of the world' and 'to move from the child as a subject of needs to a subject of rights,' (Carla Rinaldi - rechild N.4.) *The Fantastic Attic* project required the artists (and stewards) to pay close attention to the 'process' of exploring and playing rather than any predictable/desirable outcome. The artists were expected to observe the children and use this information to develop further ideas. In this way the children were able to develop their own interests and enthusiasms and be active protagonists of their own learning.

RESPONSES FROM ARTISTS

OBSERVATIONS

EXCITEMENT

I observed that when the visiting groups of children first entered *The Fantastic Attic* they were often so excited by the sheer size and freedom of the space they could hardly contain themselves. I found that after a brief introduction it was best to let the children explore, come to terms with the space and allow them to release their excited energy. When children visited for the second time I observed that they were immediately more focussed perhaps because they knew what to expect.

I also observed that there were no incidences of bad behaviour from the children. The atmosphere and style of the project seemed to provoke good behaviour. Children often commented that they did not want to leave the project and were very excited about coming back (Emma Pace - Artist)

ENGAGEMENT

Overwhelmingly I felt that the children really engaged with the space. The space intrigued them and inspired their imaginations. The children (and adults) responded to the sense of wonderment created in *The Fantastic Attic*. The project was so anti - Disney which made a refreshing change for all. (Nicola Balfour - Artist)

BALANCE

The mirror complex worked well but this was only after the concave mirrors were put either end of the triangular mirrored tunnel. This was to create a balance between 'space' and 'intimacy'. (Malcolm Smith - Artist)

INSPIRATION

All of the groups that attended enjoyed the space and wanted more - there seemed to be a lot of experiences and ideas to build on. The children's approach to the space was one of 100% engagement. The adults and teachers needed more time to slot in and find a role.

At weekends nearly all the family groups who attended wanted more and found the space inspirational for their children. It was an easy space for them to be in - some families came back every weekend

There were probably too many different spaces for the children to work in - less would have been just as effective. (Kath Bedingfield - Artist)

OPPORTUNITIES

The opportunities/activities for children encouraged imaginative play. There were no toys in the attic but rather lots of interesting spaces, materials, and objects which encouraged children to experiment and use materials in their own way without any predetermined outcome or expectation. I observed that the environment and opportunities did not daunt the children. but engaged their imaginations and they became absorbed in creative play. (Emma Pace - Artist)

BENEFITS

EXPRESSION

In my experience of playgroups and nurseries I have found that they are often very limited by space restrictions, with groups having to share rooms and rooms being jam-packed with equipment, resources and materials. *The Fantastic Attic* was beneficial as it provided a simple and very spacious unrestrictive learning environment. This type of environment enabled the children to feel less restricted and express themselves more freely. (Emma Pace - artist)

IDEAS

A great deal of time, thought and energy went into designing the space. We wanted it to be a comfortable, intriguing and a creatively inspiring place to explore without restrictions. We were conscious of not going too high tech in order that ideas could be taken away and easily re-created in different settings. (Nicola Balfour - Artist)

EXPLORING

The space allowed the children to explore, invent and interact on a very large scale and in this respect was liberating. (Kath Bedingfield - Artist)

CO-OPERATION

I felt that the groups that visited the project were impressed with the ideas they saw and experienced. I am sure that ideas from the 'Attic' will find their way into certain schools and settings. The stewards took on many responsibilities. The project was a good example of collective and co-operative responsibility sharing. We all 'mucked in' and found ways of working and overcoming problems. (Malcolm Smith - Artist)

PROVOKING

The project was beneficial to adults and educators in that it presented a different approach towards setting up and facilitating activities for children. This proved to be challenging inspiring and thought provoking for educators. (Emma Pace - Artist)

FUN

At the weekends the families who came benefited from the interactive space. It allowed families to have fun, experiment, explore and play together, many families expressed how refreshing and unusual this opportunity was. (Nicola Balfour - Artist)

CHALLENGES

ROLES

As a community artist I am used to facilitating projects that largely have a predetermined or desired outcome it was surprisingly difficult to adapt to a different style of working. It took time to find, and be comfortable with, my role. However once this was achieved the freedom which the project allowed gave me great scope to support the children and their ideas without the restriction of having to produce an end result. *The Fantastic Attic* project has challenged my thinking and working style and will therefore influence my future work. I have learnt much about the process of children's discovery and learning (. Emma Pace - Artist)

FOCUS

In some sessions I felt that I was on the move all the time. There was always so much to do, from maintaining the space, to sorting out technical problems, to discussing ideas and approaches with teachers and stewards, that it was often a challenge to find the time to focus on the children and their discoveries. (Malcolm Smith - Artist)

TIME

Time was the biggest challenge. More time was needed to set up the space, to build a relationship with the space as an artist / facilitator and to build up relationships with teachers in order to describe the ethos of the space. Also more time was needed to build up relationships with children, to visit schools and to allow schools to make as many visits as they need. (Kath Bedingfield - Artist)

FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

NETWORKS

There was not enough information available for educators and parents about how to use the space. It would be of benefit to have literature about the Reggio Emilia approach for interested visitors to read or to take away. This would give people the opportunity to find out more and develop a wider network for future projects

The positive response to the project from educators made me realise that opportunities for training and gaining more information about the Reggio approach would be welcomed. This would seem to be the way forward as educators are in the best position to influence practice in early year's settings. The painting studio was not used to its full potential. I feel that it needed an artist solely based in this area to facilitate more focussed painting and artwork projects. The construction area was already too built - more opportunities for children to make their own constructions would be better. (Nicola Balfour - Artist)

DEVELOPMENT

Each school had two visits but often had different artists for each session, this made it more difficult to develop and build on the children's interests and discoveries from the first session. The same artist needs to build relationships over the two sessions to improve continuity. (Emma Pace - Artist)

ADMINISTRATION

In an ideal world I would recommend that the project should have an on-site administrator / organiser. This would enable the artists and stewards to spend more time working with the children. (Malcolm Smith - Artist)

PROFILE

There needed to be more information in the foyer of the museum about *The Fantastic Attic* project. It would also be good to have information for parents and schools to take away. The project in general needed more publicity in order to promote the space and other activities of the Sightlines Initiative. It could have been a more high profile event.

As the space was not up for long the children did not have time to impose themselves upon it. The space did not change very much or was not added to in the way I thought it might be. If the space was up for longer it may have evolved more richly as all those attending and working in it would have become more familiar with it.

The children would have benefited from more re-visits than the time allowed. (Kath Bedingfield - Artist)

DESIGN

The dressing up area should be nearer to the shadow screen to allow for more interactions between the two areas as they naturally work so well together. (Nicola Balfour - Artist)

FUTURE OF PROJECT

TIMESCALE

The Fantastic Attic was a short event and I feel that if the project was able to run over a longer period of time, with groups making many visits, it could begin to have a powerful effect/impact on early years practice. (Emma Pace - Artist)

The project worked well given the short time in which it had to be organised and set up an impressive amount was achieved. If the project had been given more time and resources it could have been better developed. If these considerations are taken on board the possibility of touring the project or putting it in a permanent setting could be realised. (Malcolm Smith - Artist)

LONGEVITY

I think the future of the space could be a great asset to schools and could even belong in a permanent space. It is something that needs longevity in order to develop fully. A space that children can visit regularly and through which meaningful links can be established with schools. (Kath Bedingfield - Artist)

THE ROLE OF STEWARDS

The stewards at *The Fantastic Attic* were B.Ed. students from the University of Northumbria. The stewards were asked to be guides for the visiting groups and observers of the children's reactions, experiences and discoveries. They were asked to document their observations through photographs, transcripts of dialogue and their own notes.

In the initial stages of the project many of the stewards were unclear about their role within the scheme of things. *The Fantastic Attic* encompassed an unusual and perhaps unfamiliar approach towards working with children.

The stewards as trainee teachers are used to having to plan their work to meet prescribed objectives and lead activities for children. Here they were asked to let the children lead the way and to simply observe, document and support their activities. Initially this proved to be quite a challenge. However it only took a matter of time before they discovered their own role for themselves. This was a very important part of their learning process. *The Fantastic Attic* project had no prescribed structure or rules or direct comparison, therefore, it was unknown territory, ambiguous and open to interpretation. The project required each member of the team to find their own way and to discover through their own experience, without any preconceived ideas how best they could fulfil their role. Once the project was up and running and became more familiar the stewards grew more confident and enthusiastic, with more ideas, input and responsibilities. They proved to be a committed, professional, reliable and inspired team and as stressed by Sue Allen (steward), "The success of the project relied upon a dedicated team."

The stewards soon established themselves as a support network for the artists and project as a whole. Besides their role to support the children the stewards also volunteered to take on further responsibilities ranging from preparing the space, to clearing, tidying and adapting the space, to processing and filing documentation, (photographs and notes) to giving input through ideas to maintaining the space and smooth running of the project.

RESPONSES FROM STEWARDS

OBSERVATIONS

MAGIC

The introduction was very important. The scene had to be set. A sense of magic and fairytales given in the introduction, lead to a higher expectation and exploration inside the attic. The setting of the project was a key feature, the 'attic' had an amazing light and warmth about it, partly created by very clever people and partly due to the ambience of the fourth floor of the Discovery Museum. (Sue Allen - steward - B.Ed. student)

OUTCOMES

I observed that the outcomes for the children were much better when their teachers gave them (children) the freedom to explore. The use of the space generally worked well, the variety of rooms was vast and covered a wide range of learning opportunities. The only space that was under used was the painting studio, however this improved over the weeks by sticking paper all over the walls and floor and leaving drawing materials out (pens, chalk, charcoal, pastels etc.) The children really liked the freedom of being able to draw, scribble, and create all over the walls. (Fiona Herbert – steward – B.Ed. student)

REASSURANCE

The majority of teachers and parents were positive and appreciative. The adults occasionally required reassurance at the introduction that it was acceptable for the children to have a free run of the attic. Occasionally adults felt more comfortable if familiar activities were provided as an option. It seemed that the adults needed reassurance by familiarity more than the children, who seemed more open to the "concept" of the attic.

The Fantastic Attic was a well designed, very interesting and impressive space begging to be explored. Curtains, doorways and partitions divided the vast area of the great hall. The separate areas created encouraged exploration as it meant that the children had to actually enter the different areas to see what was in them.

In carrying out observations and taking photos of children it became apparent that generally after initial excitement for exploring faded, the children would settle on a particular area which focussed

their attention. This resulted in some very imaginative play unfolding. (Keith Henderson - steward - B.Ed. student)

ENTHUSIASM

The children were incredibly enthusiastic and keen to take part on both an individual and group level. The space was well set out; there was enough room for children to explore freely without feeling inhibited by the new experiences provided. I felt that the visiting nurseries and centres appreciated what the project had to offer. The activities and areas unavailable at nursery, school, etc. were the most popular with the children i.e. Dens, torches, big instruments, light boxes, over-head-projector, shadow screen. (Louise Ferguson - steward - B.Ed. student.)

BENEFITS

PLAY

The project enhanced the importance of play. The project enabled children to freely explore a variety of different environments that are often unavailable in childcare settings (due to a lack of time, money, space, resources etc.). I learnt that central to children's learning is play and when the child initiates it, the child is far more enthusiastic, motivated and engaged in their own work. (Louise Ferguson - steward - B.Ed. student)



EXPLORATION

The Fantastic Attic encouraged child-led exploration and the project provided a plethora of inspirational ideas to introduce to the nursery and classroom. (Sue Allen – steward – B.Ed. student)

FREEDOM

The children benefited from the space to roam freely (as opposed to the confines of school/nursery) and from the opportunities for exploratory play and visually stimulating (sensory) activities. These activities were particularly suitable for children with special educational needs. The simple, effective ideas used in the attic (over head projectors, shadow screens etc.) could easily (Keith Henderson - steward - B.Ed. student)

LEARNING

The project has motivated me to give children opportunities to guide their own learning more in the classroom, for children to simply try new things and to explore space and objects, which is something that they are often prevented from doing. (Fiona Herbert --steward – B.Ed. student)

CHALLENGES

PLANNING

I felt that the double booking of sessions did not work well. Although the size of the attic could accommodate several groups, it became difficult to observe children when two or more different groups were involved. This also makes recording / documenting more difficult. (Sue Allen - steward - B.Ed. Student)

CHILDREN

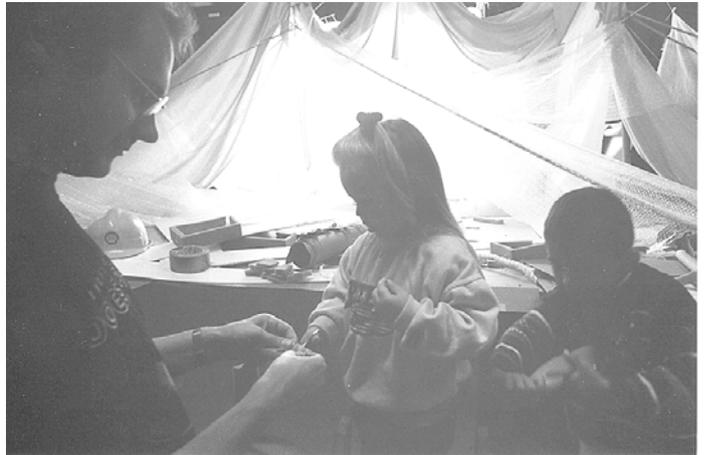
I felt that due to their lack of free play experiences some children felt unable to explore freely without the intervention of adults as leaders. It was a challenge to encourage visiting adults to avoid this. I found one of the most prominent challenges was ensuring that it was the children who provoked ideas and led the exploration of the space. It seemed like a huge challenge for adults to make the shift from directing the children's activities to observing and supporting them instead. (Louise Ferguson - steward - B.Ed. student)

SUPPORT

The whole project was an interesting and innovative look at education for the under fives. During our degree, we have been taught how to plan and guide children through activities, the attic showed me how successful activities can be when the children lead the activity while the adults support them. (Fiona Herbert – steward – B.Ed. student)

INDIVIDUALITY

As trainee teachers we are taught to encourage/guide children in a specific activity towards a specific objective to be learnt and assessed. I found the approach adopted on this project both challenging and refreshing as it was less contrived and offered the children the chance to utilise their imaginations encouraging individuality and personal growth. As *The Fantastic Attic* project developed it was a continuous challenge for all attic staff to develop activities, ideas and the environment. These developments were born out of discussions and observations and helped to create a growing project. (Keith Henderson - steward - B.Ed. student)



FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

BOOKINGS

I believe each group felt their 'booking' was almost a private and exclusive arrangement - almost to have the 'attic' to themselves. With another group present it seemed to spoil the dream in a way - it became a public experience instead of a private one. A possible way forward would be to have the first visit a private one and the second visit could be shared, along with ideas and experiences. Consideration could be given to the role of stewards. I hope that we brought enthusiasm, professionalism, new ideas and commitment. It seems strange therefore that the allocation of funding to support the staffing of this project was given such a small consideration. None of us supported this project for the money, however as students it is an aspect, which has to be present. (Sue Allen - steward - B.Ed. student)

MEETINGS

I would have liked to have regular "team" meetings to discuss roles, queries and progression of the project.

Double bookings of the sessions were too hectic and stressful. When double booked each group did not receive the same adult input and support at the beginning and end of each session. (Louise Ferguson - steward - B.Ed. student)

COMMUNICATION

Initially some students felt under-prepared and unsure of their role and what was expected of them. Information could be sent out to students to avoid confusion over this issue. (Keith Henderson - steward - B.Ed. student)

DIFFICULTIES

Most participating groups appreciated the project, although some staff (especially teachers) initially found it very difficult to give the children the freedom necessary to explore the space in their own way. (Fiona Herbert – steward - B.Ed. student)

FUTURE OF PROJECT

PERMANENT SITE

Some teachers and other staff left the project saying that they intended setting something up based on the attic idea, these varied from whole rooms in private nurseries to home corners in reception classes. The future of the project could be extremely promising with a more permanent site, with

children from a wider area visiting or local children visiting more frequently. (Fiona Herbert – steward – B.Ed. student)

STIMULATING

The Fantastic Attic has been a stimulating learning experience for everyone involved (students, teachers, nursery staff, artists and children) It will be very much missed. I see the project being used again and again. (Sue Allen - steward - B.Ed. student)

POSITIVE

Hopefully the project will go from strength to strength. Through the use of widespread advertising and positive input/feedback gained from schools and nurseries I am sure this approach to learning in the early years will start to be accepted with the credit it deserves. A permanent venue would be great. (Louise Ferguson - steward - B.Ed. student)

SUCCESS

If the attic were set up again (as it surely should be) then a more complete starting point would be achieved with resources and observations from 2000. It would be a pity not to re-use resources and build on the success of this year. (Keith Henderson - steward - B.Ed. student)



THE VISITORS

RESPONSES FROM PARTICIPATING GROUPS

There were nineteen schools, playgroups and nurseries who attended *The Fantastic Attic* project. It is unnecessary to document all of the individual group's responses as there are so many. In order to avoid repetition a varied range of responses have been selected to offer a broad based and accurate assessment.

OBSERVATIONS

The use of the lightboxes and projector was very interesting. The children aged 21 - 27 months really enjoyed mixing and pouring and sorting all the little bits and creating pictures. (Louise - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

The children were overwhelmed by the amount of resourcing i.e. all the different possible choices they had to make! The children particularly liked the dens and the torches and also the fantastic range of dressing up outfits were very popular. I felt that the class used the second session more constructively, they moved equipment around, created stories and generally spent time in each area rather than just roaming around. (Jan Jefferson - Teacher - Hawthorn Primary School)

The mirror room was excellent and the children loved looking at themselves in different ways. (Kelly - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

Some of the children simply loved the bits of wood and vices found in one of the dens. The dens and torches provoked lots of interest and excitement in the children. Some of them seemed more confident in the smaller / darker areas. (Nora - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

The attic inspired the children's imaginations i.e. a simple piece of white cloth became a prop for dressing up as a sheep. This led to a small group acting out their own version of 'little Bo Peep' (Sherry Pallen - Early Years Co-ordinator - Spring Gardens Primary School)

Making shadow pictures with the projector was a source of great interest and concentration (Nora - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

I felt that the variety of experiences helped keep the children occupied, as each child's interests were catered for. (Jane - staff - St. Marks R C Primary)

At first the children ran from one area to another without fully exploring or using the equipment available. After a short while they began to form small groups and play with the resources. They really enjoyed making shadow puppets with the artist and playing with them behind the shadow screen. The children all commented on how much they had enjoyed their visit (Sherry Pallen - Early Years Co-ordinator - Spring Gardens Primary School)

Many of the children loved the treasures they found and hiding them in the treasure chests. (Louise - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

The comfy quiet room was a good idea to focus children and reflect on the experience. Some of the children liked the loud instrument room, although there wasn't much around apart from the centrepiece. Some of the children were scared of the little puppets in the dressing up area. (Louise - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

The children thoroughly enjoyed the experience and they could not wait for their second visit. They talked non - stop about the different areas and which ones they planned to work at next time. (Jane - staff - St. Marks R C Primary)

BENEFITS

Some of the children in my group (21months - 27months) are really quiet and shy, but five minutes into *The Fantastic Attic*, they were running around, laughing and exploring on their own. It really brought them out of themselves. (Kelly - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

The project had enormous benefits for the children, developing their knowledge of the world, creative development and personal and social development. (Jane - staff - St. Marks R C Primary)

The Fantastic Attic inspired myself and my staff to create a similar environment in our own nursery for our leaver's party. The children loved it. (Meg - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

The children were amazed at the amount of freedom they were allowed compared to the constraints of the classroom. Many children chose activities not normally available in school. The children were much more imaginative in their use of the equipment and I noticed how well they organised themselves into groups for certain activities, without adult intervention and with children that they wouldn't normally play with. (Sherry Pallen - Early Years Co-ordinator - Spring Gardens Primary School)

I myself was overwhelmed by the amount of resourcing and the ideas for different levels of play for Early Years. It was an inspiration of ideas to try out. (Jan Jefferson - Teacher - Hawthorn Primary)

FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

There was an incident when we visited where a man came into the space and started taking photographs of the children and talking to them. He did not introduce himself to us and so we had to question his position. It turned out that he was involved in photographing the project. However, this raised an important area of concern, as childcarers we have to be so careful to protect the children in our care, this is especially apparent when on outings and in unfamiliar surroundings. Therefore it would be useful to have an adult to guard the main door to the space to ensure that it is a completely 'safe' environment. This person could also ensure that no little ones could escape. (Kelly and Claire - staff - Elmfield Nursery)

I am now taking Reception Class for this year and if anyone would like to experiment with play areas in the classroom I would be very receptive. (Jan Jefferson - Teacher - Hawthorn Primary School)

The only problem we encountered was the access. The lift could not take the whole class and the stairs were dangerous in that if the adults stayed with the slower children, the others were out of sight. (Jane - staff - St. Marks R C Primary)

I would have liked to have visited the 'Attic' before taking the children so that I would have been able to prepare more adequately. (Jan Jefferson - Teacher - Hawthorn Primary School)

PARTICIPATING GROUPS

The following groups attended *The Fantastic Attic* project.

- ◆ Jesmond Nursery
- ◆ Atkinson Road Nursery
- ◆ Spring Gardens Primary School
- ◆ Carville First School
- ◆ Cruddas Park Early Years Centre
- ◆ Hawthorn Primary School
- ◆ NCH Action for Children
- ◆ Ravenswood Primary School
- ◆ Redesdale First School
- ◆ South Benwell Nursery
- ◆ St. Marks RC Primary School
- ◆ Waverley First School
- ◆ Armstrong Road Community Nursery
- ◆ Coquet Park First School
- ◆ Hadrian School
- ◆ Elmfield Nursery

RESPONSES FROM FAMILIES

What a 'fantastic attic'. Great fun for all. (10-6-2000 parents of Sarah and Dylan.)

My little boy insisted on coming after visiting with his nursery. Toddler heaven. (10-6-2000 Anonymous)

I liked the magical, musical butterfly best. (11-6-2000 Jade Jackson aged five)

I found it strange that it was so empty on a weekend - we had a lovely time only a shame more didn't, early days I guess. (11-6-2000 Liz Bower)

How refreshing to find an activity for under fives. It makes such a difference when you don't have to stop the children from touching things. We'll be back. (17-6-2000 Anonymous)

Shadow puppets - what a brilliant idea. The artist explained how we could set up a simple shadow screen at home. Thanks for the inspiration! (17-6-2000 Heather Hill)

Relaxing for me - endless fun for the kids. (18-6-2000 Anonymous.)

We came across this event by chance and were so glad that we did. My toddler loved the freedom of it all. It could be better advertised so many more could make the most of it. (24-6-2000 Mother of will aged three years.)

I liked doing bang bang on the big drum. (24-6-2000 Thomas aged four.)

I liked the fantasy picture making. (25-6-2000 Daniel aged 6)

We've had a wonderful afternoon. Jake loved sorting all the little bits and bobs and making patterns on the over head projector.

Poppy enjoyed making dancing shadows to music behind the giant shadow screen. (25-6-2000 Mother of Jake aged two and poppy aged five.)

I liked dressing up as a bear (25-6-2000 Ben aged three)

It was really great at *The Fantastic Attic*. Please could we have one for seven-year-olds for it would be as good and fantastic as this one? (1-7-2000. Lauren aged seven)

Wonderful artist - did very well. Lovely interaction with the children. My son had a fabulous time painting. All the fun starts at home now. Keep it up. (1-7-2000. Mother of Jake aged fourteen months)

It was good. We liked going in the tunnels. (2-7-2000. Andrew Bell.)

Sophie had a brilliant time. Funding should be made available for a permanent under-fives area. (1-7-2000. Mother of Sophie aged three)

The children had a wonderful time exploring and playing with all the activities. (8-7-2000. Anonymous)

Katherine liked the room with the furry rugs and the mirrored cubicle best. Thank-you. (8-7-2000. Mother of Katherine aged six months.)

The children had a wonderful time and loved exploring all the areas. The over head projector was most loved. Thank you for a lovely time. (9-7-2000. Anonymous.)

I really enjoyed this part of the museum. I would like to come again. (9-7-2000 Sara Lowes aged seven)

Really superb space - magic and discovery - should be repeated in every village hall. (9-7-2000 Anonymous)

Great to see such an alternative child friendly place, what a change from Thomas the Tank Engine! The lack of restrictions meant that I felt very very welcome and at ease even with two very lively under-fives. They both loved the dark dens, the mirrors, the little glass beads, the dressing-up and being allowed to make big noises in the music area. Thanks. (9-7-2000 Mother of David aged three and Bobby aged twenty months.)

Wonderful - the children loved it. Have it again soon. (9-7-2000 Anonymous)



THE VENUE

THE DISCOVERY MUSEUM

The Discovery Museum was the venue for 'The Hundred Languages Of Children' exhibition in 1997 and through this project a good relationship between the museum and The Sightlines Initiative had been established. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to further develop this relationship and use this setting for *The Fantastic Attic* project.

The Discovery Museum was enthusiastic about being involved in the project. The museum supported the event by offering 'The Great Hall' space to the project rent-free. This space was ideally suited to the project. 'The Great Hall' is situated on the top floor of the museum and it is a vast space with a mysterious ambience all of its own.

The museum's curator / manager Graham Bradshaw was interviewed to provide feedback on *The Fantastic Attic* project from the museum's perspective. This information is relevant as the Discovery Museum could be used as a venue for future events.

THE RESPONSE

Graham Bradshaw made the following points:

- ◆ The museum was pleased with the outcome of the project.
- ◆ On a personal and professional level he wanted to support the aims and approach of the project.
- ◆ He is keen to develop work with this age group (under fives) within the museum as projects are usually only aimed at older groups. He views it as a new avenue for them to explore.
- ◆ He was impressed by how the space was transformed and how visually attractive it was.
- ◆ He observed that the children seemed very happy and inquisitive in the space.

- ◆ He was impressed by how much had been achieved within such a limited time.
- ◆ There were no problems reported to him by the museum staff and he felt that co-operation between the 'Attic' staff and the museum staff worked well.
- ◆ There was only one 'health and safety' issue, which was brought to his attention (screen in attic falling on child), and attic staff dealt this with very professionally. It also highlighted important 'health and safety' issues relevant to the museum in general. He commented that the museum needed to have 'health and safety' procedures and policies in place for this type of project and that the museum is currently addressing this issue.
- ◆ The general promotion and advertising for the event was low key and the museum is currently reviewing its internal advertising strategy in order to improve this area.
- ◆ There were no problems reported concerning the organisation and running of the project.
- ◆ He stressed that he was pleased to be associated with the project and would be interested in being involved in any future events.



INTERVIEW WITH PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR

Q - What were your aims for 'The Fantastic Attic' project?

A - Firstly my aim was to supplement the work going on in the 'Young Children's Creative Thinking In Action' project, a three year project in early years settings in Tyne & Wear. I wanted to find another way of introducing reflective and creative practice into early year's settings not already involved in those projects. We had previously received such a positive response from 'The Hundred Languages Of Children' exhibition held at Newcastle Discovery museum in 1997 so I was keen to use this venue again. I wanted to build on our previous experience and offer more opportunities to nurseries and playgroups. My idea was to create an experience to inspire educators (through observing the children) to take the ideas back to their own settings to develop their own practice. I also wanted to develop new relationships with people. I felt that with 'The Fantastic Attic' project and follow up sessions we could build up more networks with early year's settings.

Q - What were the main obstacles in getting the project up and running?

A - After we had secured our funding we only had two to three months to get the project up and running and so the timescale was the biggest problem. We had to get a design and construction team together very quickly to create the space. The publicity and marketing had to happen in a very short space of time as did all other administration for the project. We wanted to have a preliminary session at each setting with one of our resident artists but the timescale did not allow this.

Q - Was the space successful in terms of your aims?

A - The design of the space was an experiment, as the Great Hall is a big space and as it is empty quite flexible, so the question was what to put in it. The design and construction team (and myself) managed to sub - divide the great big space into smaller cosy sections. The management and maintenance of the equipment became an issue due to the quick turnaround between groups out of which some inspirational and successful ideas emerged. The project worked differently at weekends rather than during the week, We felt that we could accommodate groups more effectively than individual families coming with children. At weekends the space was there for the public to experience but interactions with the resident artists became more incidental.

Q - How did you feel about the outcome of the project?

A - I continued to be excited by the overall planning and achievement of it. During the planning stages the event seemed quite risky in that it was breaking new ground in many ways. It was very encouraging having such positive comments and feedback from children and staff. The project seems to have been successful and people seemed to be pleased with it. I feel satisfied and quite clear about how we can improve it. I still feel challenged to try and develop an adequate next phase or next project arising from the success and learning of *The Fantastic Attic*. I don't have a picture of it yet. I feel excited and amazed by the amount of energy and enthusiasm from participants, students, artists and museum staff.

Q - Where do you see the project going in terms of future development?

A - I think that there are many possibilities. I have been considering a permanent or semi - permanent event or venue; however, this would require adequate capital funding and its own feasibility study. To go down this road I think first of all we would need to have the potential interest of a funder, this could have several benefits as we could start to work with a wide variety of groups and it would overcome the short termism. It would also require an enormous amount of effort needed for a feasibility study, design, planning, organisation, administration and fundraising. Another possibility is for the event to be taken like a circus to other venues around the district, or other regions, again this would require an enormous amount of planning to ensure that each venue would be successful plus there would need to be individual publicity for each venue. It may also be a possibility to run the project as a regular summer event at the Discovery Museum.

Q - Were there any aims for the project that were not met?

A - One of the highlights of the idea was to encourage some of the less well off settings to engage in the project, however there was still a relatively low take up by these groups. Hopefully the evaluation will highlight reasons for this. Also as mentioned previously the aim of collecting information and visiting each individual setting prior to their visit wasn't met due to the timescale.

Q - How could you overcome the 'timescale' issue?

A - I haven't yet thought about whether we would run it again in the same way or create another experience which wouldn't have the same timescale limitations. I don't think I would want to run it again with the same short lead in time

Q - What recommendations would you make to improve on marketing and take up?

A - It became apparent that physically getting to the museum was a big problem for some groups. We could try and do a block booking of transport for the event and offer it at cost to the groups. We could have small seminar meetings or introductory meetings with network heads like Pre-school Learning Alliance and Network Partnerships to provide more information which they could pass on to groups.

INTERVIEWED BY EMMA PACE ON 12 - 9 - 2000



MARKETING AND PUBLICITY REVIEW

MARKETING

The main funding for *The Fantastic Attic* project was not secured until just a couple of months before the project was due to commence, therefore, the marketing for the project had to be done very quickly. The marketing was crucial to ensure a high level of interest and bookings from the targeted groups. The Sightlines Initiative produced information leaflets and fliers (see appendix 2) and via Early Years Development Partnership (E.Y.D.P.) this information was distributed to providers of early years education in Newcastle upon Tyne and North Tyneside. Due to the slow response from early year's settings it was also necessary to make follow up calls to encourage groups and secure bookings. Interested groups were sent a Fantastic Attic brochure detailing the event (what to expect / what to bring etc.) Participating groups were asked to pay a small fee of £20 per group - per session amounting to £40 for the two sessions offered.

PUBLICITY

In addition to publicity being sent to early year's settings the event was also publicised within Newcastle Discovery Museum. However this was only in the form of a flier available to the public in the main entrance of the museum. (See Appendix 2) Information about the event was also sent to local newspapers (Journal / Chronicle) to feature in their 'listings' and 'what's - on' section. The event was available to groups of pre-school children during the week and open to the public at weekends for children (birth to five years) and their parents / carers. The greatest publicity was of course 'word of mouth' and first hand experience of the event, as written documents could not fully convey the experience on offer. As the project progressed and families and schools / nurseries visited *The Fantastic Attic* it became evident that families told their friends and made return visits and participating groups wanted to book more sessions. Once the project was up and running local newspapers visited and reviewed the project (see appendices 3 and 4) and both Robin Duckett (project co-ordinator) and Ian Thilthorpe (Education Officer - Discovery Museum) were interviewed by Metro Radio all this bringing more publicity to the project

RESPONSES FROM TARGETED GROUPS

Nineteen playgroups and nurseries visited the project; many of these groups attended several times bringing different groups of children. There were fifty half day sessions made available to participating groups out of which forty-six were booked (or double booked) and attended. In total approximately 700 individual children visited the project.

Robin Duckett (Project Co-ordinator) stated in his project review that; "One of the highlights of the idea was to encourage some of the less well off settings to engage in the project, however there was still a relatively low take up by these groups." In order to ascertain why this was the case it was necessary to contact some of the groups who did not respond, as a result several reasons for non-participation became apparent.

- ◆ It was not usually the actual cost to groups (£40 for two sessions) which deterred groups but the added cost of transportation to and from the venue. This cost is substantial, in the range of £100 - £200 for local groups and £200 - £300 for those slightly farther afield. This cost is obviously a legitimate obstacle for 'less well off settings'.
- ◆ Early years settings are required by law to have a ratio of one adult to four children, often this ratio needs to be increased when taking children out of their settings, for practical and safety reasons. Playgroups have commented that they find it difficult to get parents to come on outings as helpers. This problem is particularly relevant to groups caring for children with special educational needs where they need an even higher ratio of adults to children.
- ◆ Many playgroups and nurseries are only open for half days, this presents obvious difficulties as groups would be hard pressed to get to the venue, spend an adequate amount of time at the event and get back to their setting (taking into consideration time allowed for walking, toileting etc.) in time for children to be picked up by parents.
- ◆ Some groups contacted commented that they had either never received any information about the project or that it had been lost in amongst paperwork. In either case, no attention was drawn to it. However, all the non-participating groups contacted were interested in the project and wanted more information about future projects.

- ◆ Attendance from families at weekends was often very low; comments from families have bought attention to the lack of public information available about the event. Those families who did 'find' the project were very interested and positive (see 'Responses from families') therefore it is crucial to address this issue in order to increase awareness of events and attract more families.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to engage the 'less well off' early years settings in future projects it is necessary to consider the obstacles they face and to find ways to overcome them.

Firstly it has become apparent that information distributed about the project may have gone unnoticed. I therefore suggest that as well as sending out information about projects individual groups should be contacted and projects discussed.

It would also be useful to offer group's opportunities to meet with those involved in the projects to further inspire them to get involved.

The cost of transportation for groups has been identified as an obstacle for them. One possible solution to this would be to organise a block booking of transport for events, which could either be subsidised by funding or at least offered to groups at cost.

Information could be supplied for parents in an attempt to encourage and inspire them to support the groups as helpers on visits to projects.

Families visiting Newcastle's Discovery Museum often commented that they came across the event by chance rather than as a result of having any prior knowledge about it. This issue has been discussed with the museum who are currently examining ways in which advertising for events is circulated within the museum and the local region. Publicity for families could be improved by encouraging more media interest, providing more information within the venue (posters / directions / timetables) and to families through their own children's early years settings.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Fantastic Attic project was made possible with the help, support and sometimes the blind faith of the following individuals and organisations: -

Robin Duckett Project co-ordinator – Sightlines Initiative
Laura Nicol Project administrator – Sightlines Initiative

Kath Bedingfield Artist – Designer / facilitator
Nicola Balfour Artist – Designer / facilitator
Emma Pace Artist – Facilitator & summative evaluation
Malcolm Smith Artist – Designer / facilitator
Dave Daniels Construction and photography
Joe Harriot Construction

Fiona Herbert Student – U.N.N. B.Ed. Primary
Sue Allen Student – U.N.N. B.Ed. Primary
Louise Ferguson Student – U.N.N. B.Ed. Primary
Keith Henderson Student – U.N.N. B.Ed. Primary
Louisa Brizzola Student – U.N.N. B.Ed. Primary

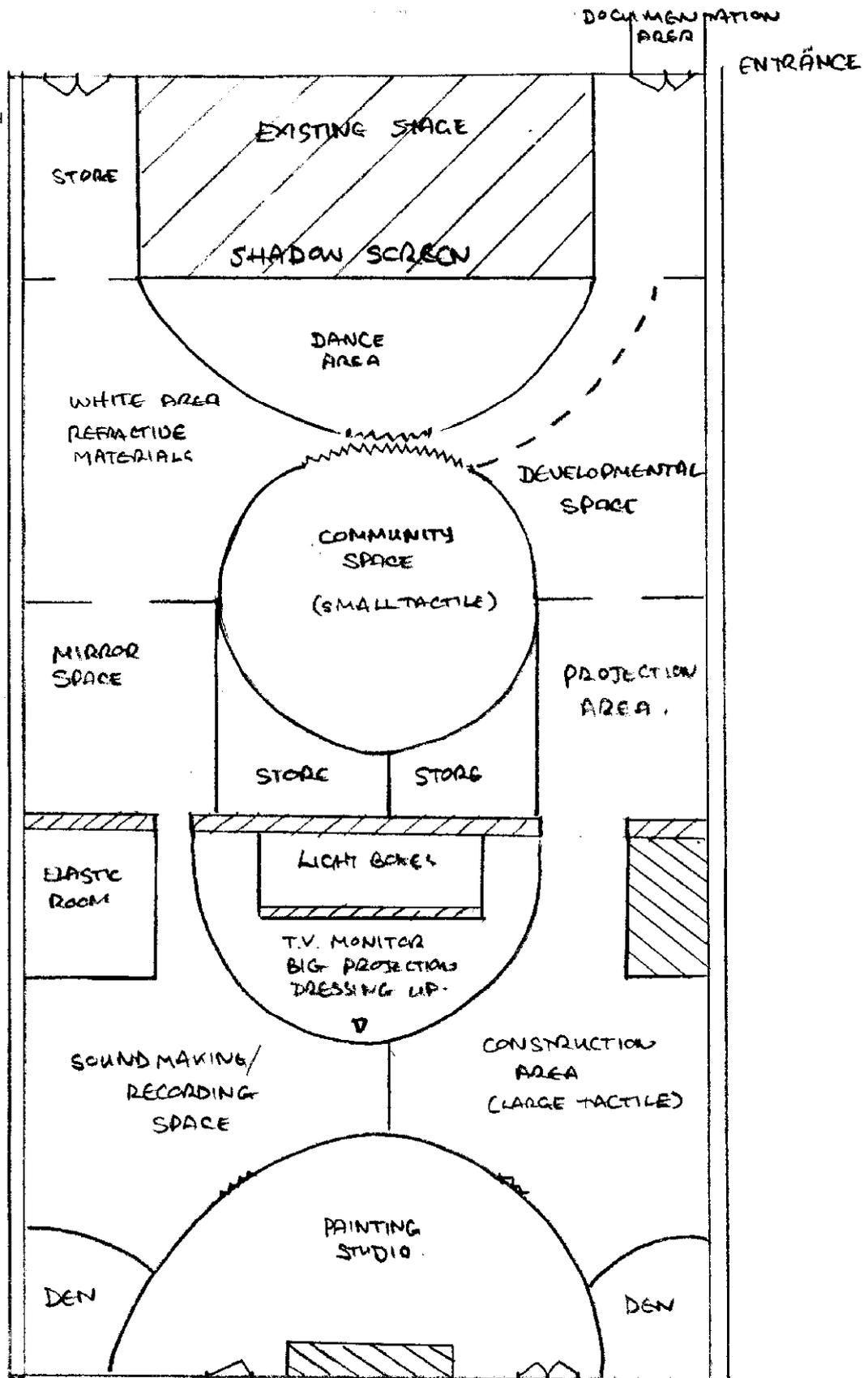
We are grateful to the following for their support and contributions

Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council (GVOC)	Financial administration
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Arts Lottery	Funding
Newcastle Discovery Museum	Venue (management, technicians, staff and stewards)
Bruce Transport	Transportation
Details The Art Shop	Materials
Factory Fabrics Blaydon	Materials

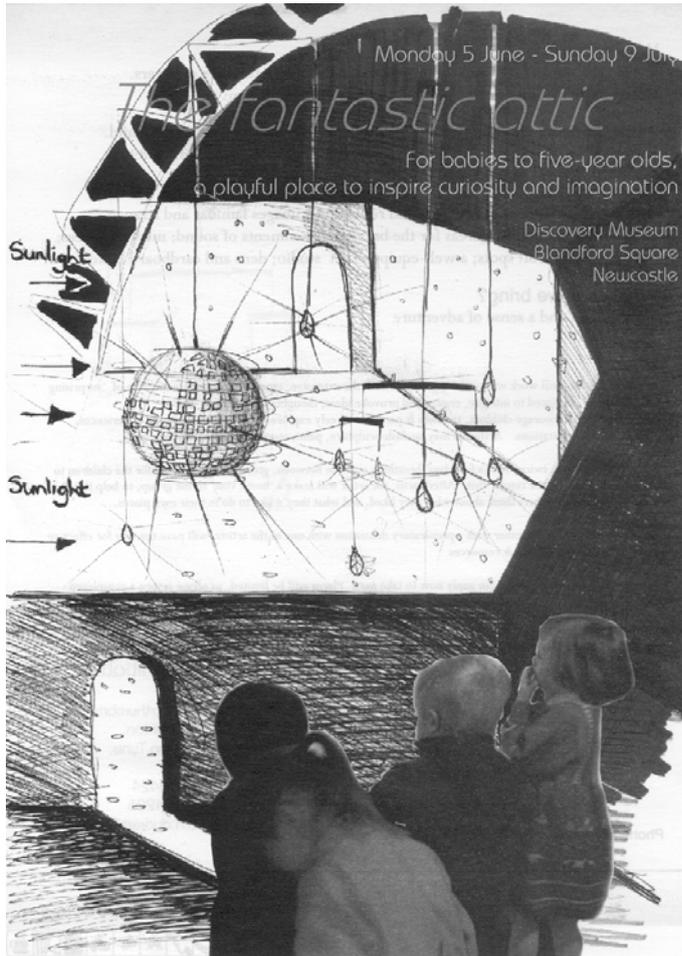
WITH THANKS,

Emma Pace
9 Gardener Place, North Shields, Tyne & Wear, NE29 6PE

APPENDIX 1 Main layout



APPENDIX 2 Publicity leaflet



What is it for?

One week, for groups of preschool children with teachers or carers. Participation cost: £2 per child /£40 group minimum.

Weekends, for children (birth – 5) and their parents. £1 entrance per child. For weekend events at Discovery contact Education Dept (232 6789).

What might we find?

... encounters with shadows, light and reflections; images familiar and strange, enormous and tiny; dark areas for the brave; environments of sound; meeting places; building places; soft spots; a well-equipped art studio; dens and cardboard boxes ...

What shall we bring?

... your ideas, and a sense of adventure

Artists and guides will work with visiting groups within the extensive, especially constructed system of 'surprising environments', designed to intrigue, engage and provoke ideas, thoughts and feelings. The project will encourage children, teachers & parents to freely explore, exchange and develop experiences, reflections and inspirations. Artforms may include sculpture, paint, storymaking, music, and dance.

Each group will visit twice, with a few days' breathing space in between, giving an opportunity for the children to gather their ideas for the return visit. Afterwards, the artist will make a 'home visit' to the group, to help the children and their teachers think about what they liked, and what they'd like to do in their own places...

An introduction pack, together with a preparatory discussion with one of the artists, will pave the way for effective and challenging use of time & resources

Nursery and preschool groups can apply now to take part. Places will be limited, so please return a completed photocopy of this page as soon as possible, expressing your interest. We hope to confirm bookings by mid May.

My group of children and I are interested in taking part!

Number of children

Age range

Contact name

Address

Phone/fax/email

SightLines Initiative



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Coach Lane, Benton,
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TREASURE HUNTERS: Leane Taylor and Shasha Hall are rooting out a great time at Fantastic Attic, the latest attraction at the Discovery Museum

Everybody loves a good rummage around in the attic and, if you are a child, so much the better. Now, the whole family can explore to their hearts' content as GORDON BARR reports

WHO, as a youngster, didn't relish the thought of finding hidden treasures in the family's attic?

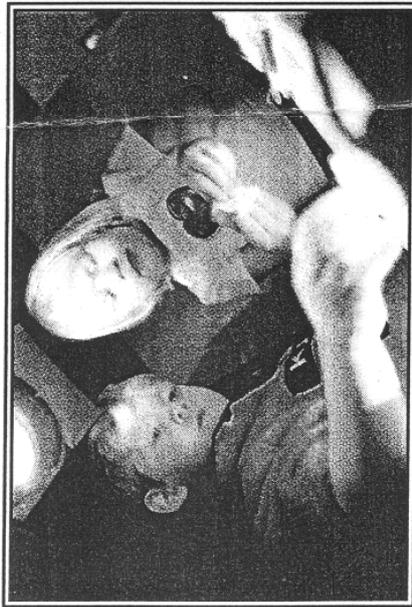
While long forgotten Old Masters and dust covered Ming vases eluded most of us, there was always the chance of unearthing long forgotten childhood toys or family photos.

Now, Tyne & Wear Museums is giving families the chance to make discoveries of their own and learn something new at the same time.

Fantastic Attic is the latest attraction at the Discovery Museum, Blandford Square, in Newcastle and it runs until July 9.

It is a unique experience for the under-fives to wander from one room to another and, while the rooms aren't filled with heirlooms, they are choc-a-bloc with new sensations and plenty of opportunities to have some fun.

Fantastic Attic involves a range of attractions to help stimulate learning in pre-



MAKING SENSE: Luke Ogilvie and Leane Taylor see the light at Fantastic Attic, a unique experience for the under-fives

school children — and that includes babies, too.

It is designed to guide children through sensory explorations of shadows, light, reflections, sound and textures, using specific areas for quiet time, play and

creative activities. "Fantastic Attic is a special learning experience for young children and their carers and we are expecting it to be very popular," said Ian Thilthorpe, education officer for the Discovery Museum.

Fun for families

- **FANTASTIC ATTIC** is open at weekends to families on a first-come-first-served basis, with limited numbers.
- Entry is £1 per child, and the event runs until July 9.
- Weekdays are set aside for school trips.
- The Discovery Museum is open 10am to 5pm Monday to Saturday and 4pm to 5pm Sunday

"It is the start of an exciting programme of activities for children running at Discovery Museum throughout the summer."

A variety of artforms feature in the Fantastic Attic activities, based in the

EVENING CHRONICLE, Friday, June 9, 2000

Discovery's Great Hall. These include sculptures, painting, story-making, music and dance.

"There are about six different types of rooms," continued Ian. "One of the rooms you can go in to takes a look at making shadows and the shadows you make are in different colours."

"The sculpture room is also very interesting. It's an area where there are all sorts of bits and bobs and the children are encouraged to make their own sculptures out of them."

"And there will be artists there to help them on their way, too."

"Paintings and collages also figure highly, as do lights and how you can make different colours, patterns and shapes from light."

"We are also using an overhead projector to show different forms of shadows. It should prove very entertaining and educational for the youngsters."

There are still sessions available for school parties to book Monday to Friday and walk-in weekend sessions are devoted to children and their families.

EVENING CHRONICLE, Monday, June 12, 2000

Holiday show to amuse the kids

A NEW exhibition will keep toddlers busy over the summer holidays.

The exhibition, at the Discovery Museum, is aimed at pre-school children.

Tots will be given plenty of time to explore the Fantastic Attic, which uses shadows, light, reflections, sound and textures to stimulate their senses.

Ian Thilthorpe, education officer for the museum, believes the idea will be a hit with families.

Sessions

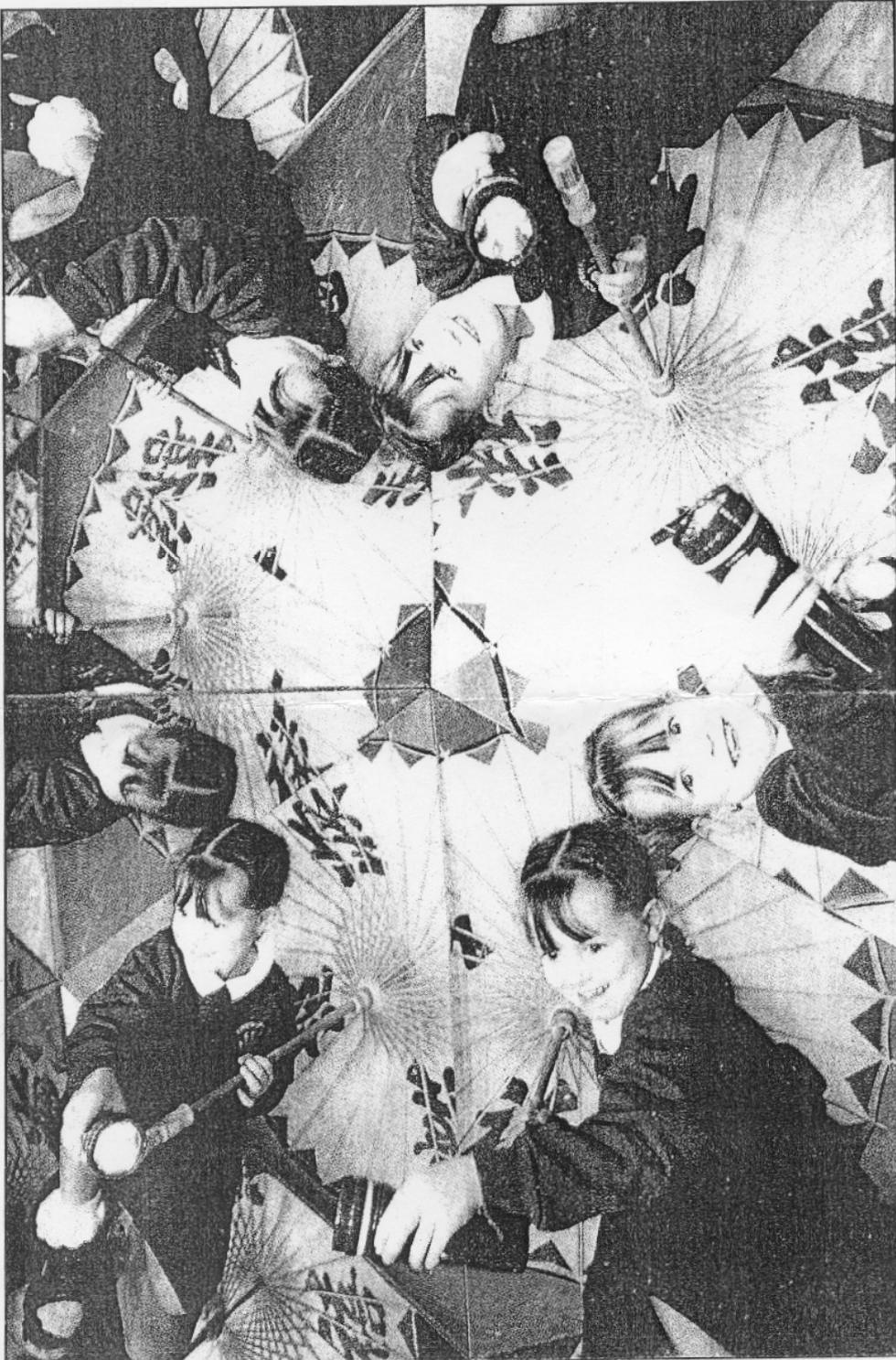
He said: "Fantastic Attic is a special learning experience for children and their carers."

School parties can book sessions during the week, while the weekend will be devoted to walk-in sessions for families with pre-school children.

The Fantastic Attic runs until July 9. Opening hours are 10am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday, and 2 to 5pm on Sunday.

For details, ring Robin Duckett of the Sightlines Initiative Project on (0191) 227 3424.

Discovery helps youngsters reflect on their sense of fun



Picture: Michael Peckett

CHILDREN are being offered a unique learning experience at a North museum's Fantastic Attic being opened this summer.

The room involves a range of experiences for babies up to five years old and is designed to guide youngsters through sensory explorations, including reflections, shadows and sound.

Zones includes specific areas for quiet time, play and creative activities.

Ian Thilthorpe, education officer for the Discovery Museum in Newcastle, said: "This is a special learning experience for young children and their carers and we are expecting it to be very popular."

"It is the start of an exciting programme of activities this summer."

Fun sessions for children involving them in sculpture, painting, story-making, music and dance are being held at the museum in Blandford Square during the summer.

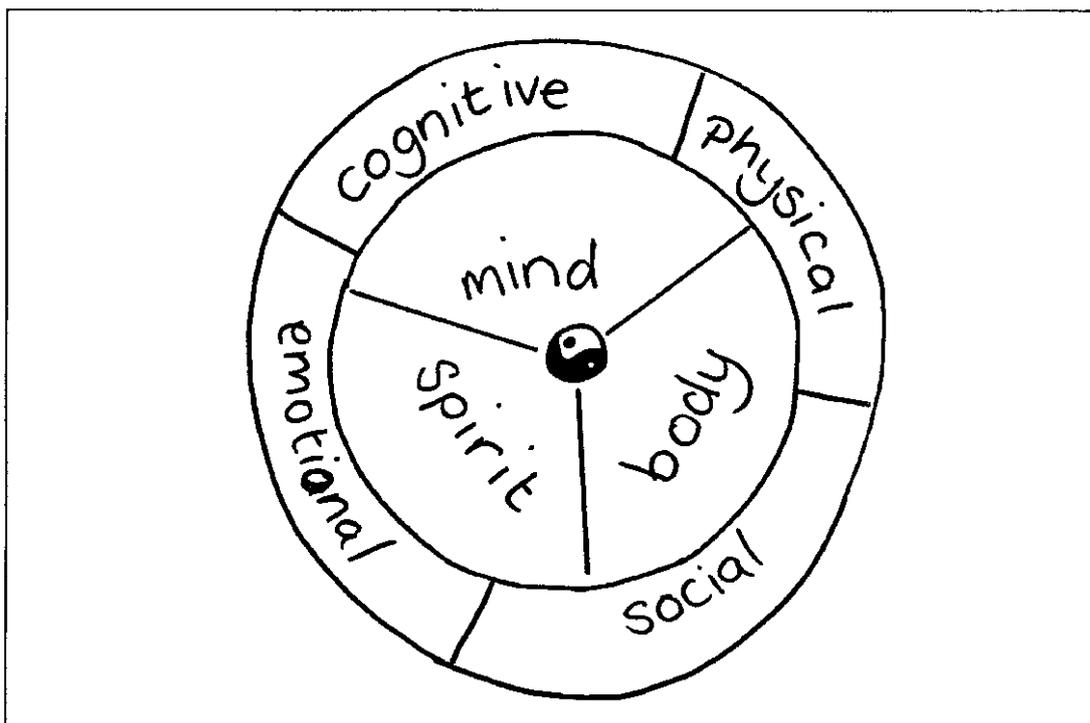
Big beams: Sasha Hall tries out the delights on offer for children up to five years old at the Discovery Museum's Fantastic Attic full of fun things to learn.

APPENDIX 4 Design briefing note

DESIGN ISSUES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Enabling competent children
Inclusion
Transferability
Many languages and ways of seeing
Dialogue and collegiality
Fun!

Big times of excitement, energy & discovery
Gaming



TYPICAL GROUPS INVOLVEMENT PLAN

- A) Visit / liaison with artist
- B) 2 x ½ day sessions
- C) Feedback / support session (artist with group)

?THEMES

"My self / Our self"
"Five Senses"
"Our Place"