

Henshaw Cabin Trust

Evaluation Parent Toddler Group Project

About Sightlines Initiative

Sightlines Initiative advocates and promotes a creative approach to learning through the development of projects which are responsive and reflective, encouraging children to think and act creatively within a supportive setting. Educators and parents are encouraged to work as nurturers and guides to facilitate the children's experiences, observing closely, listening to the children's views and hypotheses and teaching skills where needed to enable the children to develop their ideas.

Our aims and objectives

Aims

- to recognise and nurture creativity
- to develop creative initiatives with under fives
- to provide advocacy for creative learning
- to value individuality and difference
- to develop self esteem and respect for others

Objectives

for children - to provide an opportunity for children to explore, to imagine, to create, and to share ideas

for educators - to provide professional development for educators through participating in development work which focuses on the child as inventor, and creative thinker

for families - to provide an opportunity for parents to understand the reflective approach which values the child's viewpoint.

'Children's creativity develops most productively within a rich learning environment supported by interventions of sensitive and responsive adults.'
(Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage)

Sightlines programme of work covered the following areas:

- Review of environment and resources
- Developing the potential of the 'learning environment'
- Thinking systems:
developing methods of observation and documentation as a tool to support and extend children's ideas and interests, and to have them valued. Making the children's learning visible.
- Professional development
Developing the facilitating approach of adults so as to work alongside the children, supporting them in sharing and developing their own ideas and understandings.
- Develop awareness and understandings of the 'competent child', with the involvement of the parent's group,

Description

The project ran over a period of four months, February to June, comprising one half day session per week.

This connection began with visits to the parent toddler group in order to develop relationships with the children and parents and staff who work alongside the children.

Within the learning environment created within the church hall, children were encouraged to explore their environment and express themselves through many languages or modes of expression – including words, movement, drawing, painting, sculpture, shadow play, collage and music.

By allowing the many voices of children to come through and children's different ways of expressing themselves to be revealed, all children were given a voice. The emphasis on non-verbal expression meant that this approach was particularly useful in focusing upon the interests and fascinations of very young children without spoken language within the toddler group.

“Children will learn to respond , explore, express, communicate their ideas and use imagination when they have sufficient time to explore and research their ideas, imitate what they see, experiment with ideas and bring their own ideas to the process.
(Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage)

The project was a positive experience for the children and parents.

Over the duration of the project many of the parents in the group enjoyed the experience of working creatively alongside their children, exploring with paint, clay, dough, collage materials, light and shadow. Children had opportunities to listen to music, collect sounds, examine natural materials, use mirrors and digital images to explore their own identity and that of their peer group.

The babies had a special space created for them in a quiet corner of the hall. The floor was covered in cream rugs and sheepskins, cushions and mosquito netting scattered with white feathers created a soft space within a space. The babies had treasure baskets to explore, collections of natural materials which provided them with multi-sensory experiences. Trestles were strung with different objects to explore - feathers, fruit and flowers, bells, metal objects, heavy lengths of chains, woven balls, rubber gloves filled with mung beans and lentils.

'Megan Marcus and Ellie.

Lying on the sheepskin, exploring texture with hands and feet, feeling the softness of feathers, and the roughness of woven raffia are exciting first experiences to the children. Lying side by side, near but apart, sometimes reaching out and holding hands with one another.'

The environment of the church hall was transformed with the introduction of light and shadow, 'making spaces' were created offering children opportunities for creative expression, open-ended junk materials were available for the children to use and adapt to their purposes, mirrors, dens, dressing up spaces, and more.(See spaces for under threes)

The equipment and materials that were introduced into the hall offered the children new possibilities. Their responses to the learning environment were carefully observed and documented, and strategies were developed to support their interests and ideas.

The documentation was offered back to the children each week, reminding them of their interests and actions of the previous session, and building upon these ideas. Liam loved 'up and down', Emma 'placing and arranging' Holly became an expert in enclosing and enveloping objects and herself. Cameron loved emptying things, Ben exploring the vertical and dynamic movement. Every child had their own individual or group interest that was documented and supported.

Documentation offered parents the opportunity to reflect on their children's interests and actions. Several parents began to bring cameras along to the sessions to capture the children's explorations and discoveries. There was an interest in observing children's schematic behaviours, one parent followed this at home, making a narrative of her child's play to contribute to the archive of the project. Disposable cameras were offered to parents to photograph their children's work at home.

The children demonstrated the capacity to develop ideas and interests over many months.

Liam explored up and down in many ways over the entire course of the project. It was an abiding interest of his, and the materials available to him at the project allowed him to develop an expertise in the subject.

He used dynamic movement, climbing, jumping, bouncing on a trampoline, using the ohp to move shadows up and down, modelling butterflies to fly and explore upward movement, using a large bendy tube to conduct experiments, rolling different objects down the tube – balls, feathers, cars, chains, coasters, brushes and pencils, finding out about gravity and how things move.

The project concluded with a session led by Malcolm Smith, sculptor, who worked with the parents, showing them how to create dens and spaces from withies and bamboo – offering more possibilities for adapting and developing the space inside and outside the hall.