

# Playful Beginnings Creativity in the Early Years

## An evaluation

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Sightlines Initiative

# The Playful Beginnings Project-Evaluation

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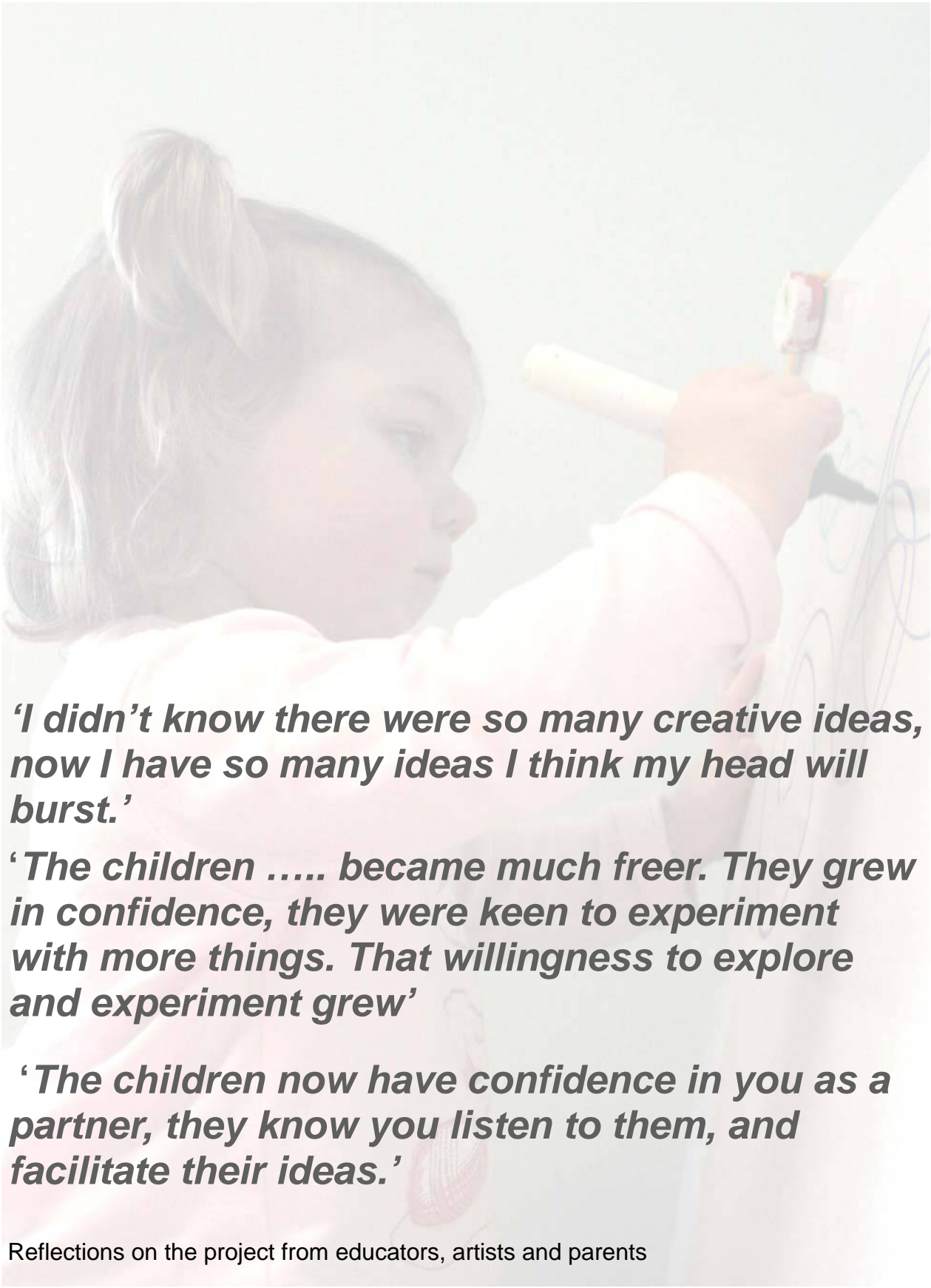
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***‘I didn’t know there were so many creative ideas, now I have so many ideas I think my head will burst.’***

***‘The children ..... became much freer. They grew in confidence, they were keen to experiment with more things. That willingness to explore and experiment grew’***

***‘The children now have confidence in you as a partner, they know you listen to them, and facilitate their ideas.’***

Reflections on the project from educators, artists and parents

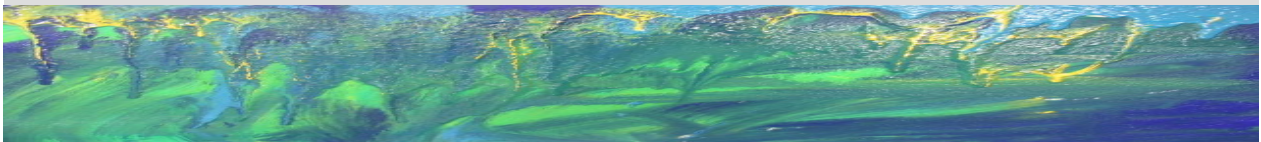
## ***Introduction and background to the project***

The Playful Beginnings project was set up in 2007 with funding from Easington & Horden Sure Start, District of Easington Council, and Northern Cultural Skills Partnership.. The initiative, which was run over spring and summer of 2007 created a community of projects in which artists and educators combined their skills and expertise to engage with young children's explorations of their worlds.

The purpose of the project was to 'create significant opportunities for and experience of, creative approaches to communication, exploration and expression' in two early years settings.

It aimed to be an innovative project with a focus on:

- the development of creative education
- the involvement of parents and carers in their children's learning journeys
- the mentoring of an artist in a role which facilitated young children's emerging creativity



The project was informed by the Sightlines Initiative family of creativity projects. The inspiration for these projects came from the approach taken in the internationally renowned pre-schools of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy. The educational provision there derives from distinct theories about children and their learning. These theories encompass a view of children as strong, rich and competent learners with the right to an environment and experiences that reflect these beliefs. The Italian schools are characterised by the recognition of the centrality of the role of the parent in their children's education, and the inclusion of an artist, (atelierista) as a full staff member to work with the children on projects, (progettazione) in order to support and develop creative thinking. The way in which the artist works is very different to the traditional way in which artists are employed in schools in the UK in which a final product is a significant outcome. Instead, the artists, working in collaboration with educators, allow children to have meaningful experiences based on their individual interests and learning dispositions, without the constraints of a pre arranged curriculum.

The projects used the pedagogy of the Reggio pre-schools as a strong reference point.

An initial series of workshops for the staff team of the participating settings aimed to develop an understanding of this facilitating approach to creativity.

The initial programme comprised 3 twilight seminar/workshop sessions.

The following areas were examined

- The image of the child
- Creative thinking in action
- What makes a good project
- Working with light and shadow
- Demystifying 3d constructions

Nuts and bolts-how to arrange sessions and reflection time



The project artist had a proven commitment to developing creative thinking and to working collaboratively. The artist undertook to support a mentee artist.

The parents/carers were introduced to the aims and ethos of the project through an introductory talk, through sharing the close documentation of their children's experiences, regular presentations, and participating in the sessions offered to the children.

The focus of involving parents in the learning journeys of their children was sustained by providing an innovative learning environment for the children shaped by the use of recycled, open-ended materials which the parents were invited to help gather and use alongside their children. These 'intelligent materials' (cf resource list) have the characteristic of inviting the children's investigations and explorations, they are not prescriptive, but pose questions and invite experimentation.



## The Projects: Organisation

The projects were organised to allow the lead and mentee artists to work half-day sessions in each of the two settings for a period of fifteen weeks. This time scale allowed time for reflection and development between sessions. The artists supported activities by offering skills and resources that would be based on detailed observations and close attention to children's thinking processes.

The children attending the weekly sessions were aged between 0-3years, accompanied by their parents/carers.

The focus of the project was to develop a creative methodology in helping children explore and communicate their own ideas and understandings, and to share this understanding with their parents/carers.

One of the educators in the settings described the purpose of the project as follows:

***'It's giving the children more autonomy, getting inside the child's head, being exploratory, offering them challenges and supporting their ideas. I can't stop now.'***

An artist's view was expressed as:

***It's a holistic and organic approach. Things develop, they're not predetermined. It's like a drop of paint on blotting paper, you have to follow that blot.'***

*The methodology of this evaluation was to interview the staff of the settings and the artists who worked alongside them. On occasion it was possible to see the work in progress, to look at documentation or changes made to settings as a result of the projects but interviews provided the bulk of the data.*

The lead artist, a sculptor, had 10 years experience in the role of the creative enabler. The mentee artist was a fine artist with an interest in developing early years expertise. Their joint skills and experience included ceramics, sculpture, fine art, and general craft –based work. The artists work with the children included:

Sensory experiences - water, clay, wood, light, sound

Spatial experiences – constructions, dens

Specifically expressive/ interpretive experiences – movement, paint and drawing

Among the topics discussed in the interviews with the staff and artists in the settings were:

new insights they had gained

reflections on the children's responses

feelings about the experience of working with a professional from a different background

arrangements they had made for the project

the documentation they kept and the use that was made of it



***E' The children had the opportunity to encounter various 'creative experiences' using different material'***

## The Interviews

### *General impressions*

The projects were characterised by a generally positive response from educators, parents and mentee artist, though there were variations in the long-term impact of the projects.

Individual personalities and team stability were a major factor in the effectiveness of the project. Where the artist educator team was consistent, the life of the project was rich and dynamic. Where staff changes were a factor, the collaboration was more difficult to develop and sustainability was undermined to some extent.

The degree of autonomy that the staff could exercise varied, as did the use of space. Because the dedicated space was multi-use in each case, this limited the possibility of leaving resources and the work of the children in situ to be developed in further sessions.

One setting had a larger outdoor space to work in with more interesting features. In each setting the children could access the activities if they wished, all of the children had autonomy in this respect. In one setting the project activities were integrated and became part of the whole planning and ethos of the sessions; in the other they were more often kept separate, a special event during the artists' session time. The amount and type of documentation kept differed markedly, as did the use made of it.

Extracts from the interviews have been used to illustrate the main findings and give a flavour of the thinking, main issues and development of those involved in the projects and of the effects on the settings themselves.

Responses to interview questions have been grouped into 5 areas identified as being of significance to the evaluation. These areas reveal the different strands that emerged and cover the larger issues of the new learning of the practitioners and the artists, the effects of this on ideology and practice and the response of the children and parent/carers to the projects.

The 5 areas into which extracts from the interviews have been grouped are:

- Effects of the Playful Beginnings projects for children
- Personal growth and development of the adults involved: educators/artist/parents/carers
- Artist-educator collaboration
- Development of provision
- Documentation
- 

To give a sense of who is talking, each extract is identified by an abbreviation that identifies whether it is an educator, (E) an artist, (A) or a parent/carer (P).



## 1. Effects of the Playful Beginnings project for the children involved.

There was general consensus that the project was a very positive experience for the children involved.

The adults commented on a growth of confidence, development of autonomy, children managing risk and challenge, and a shift in adult-child relationships to one which was more democratic and empowering for the children.

The children were felt to have benefited from having a wider range of creative opportunities available to them.

*E 'The children had lots of opportunities for creative development. Over a period of weeks I noticed a difference in confidence and self esteem, the children were able to use materials more creatively and were willing to experience new situations. The children also used their own personal and judgement skills.'*

*E 'The children's confidence grew*

*The activities and the materials challenged the children, children like to challenge themselves, they developed confidence by challenging themselves, using different mediums.'*

*E' The children had the opportunity to encounter various 'creative experiences' using different material'*



*The children became much freer.  
They grew in confidence, they were keen to experiment with more things.*



## Autonomy

The educators and artists both identified the impact of this freer approach to the early years programme. The children grew in confidence and became protagonists in the planning process. Their interests became the rightful focus of the life of the setting.

*E The children were allowed any kind of play. They became much freer.*

*E They grew in confidence, they were keen to experiment with more things. That willingness to explore and experiment grew. The children ask for things now, as young as they are.*

*A The children have confidence in you as a partner, they know you listen to them, and facilitate their ideas.*

*E The children have more autonomy- they choose their own materials or ways to work, it's up to them what they want to do.*



## 2. Personal growth and development

The comments in this section explore the extent to which those involved in the projects developed their understanding of the approach in ways that helped them in their practice with children.

*E 'I didn't know there were so many creative ideas, now I have so many ideas I think my head will burst.'*

*'I've got more skills now, before I would never have thought of making things from recycled materials.'*

*'I can't stop. It just continues once you get started.'*

The educators reflected on an approach to working with children which is based on observation, reflection and analysis. The children, not the adults, are 'the ones who give shape to things, they are not just destined to submit.'

*E 'It allowed us as practitioners to take a step back to observe where the children's play was going and to extend their learning/add adult input if necessary.'*

*E It (the session activity) 's more exploratory now.*

*E 'I learned how to use things to develop ideas. To give the children time, repeat experiences and add a bit more to support and develop their particular ideas.'*



## Involving Parents in their children's play

The project was seen as a valuable tool in engaging parents in their children's learning and play.

By adopting a facilitating role, and closely documenting the children's learning, artists and educators offered parents insights into the individual learning journeys of their child.

One of the parents was working with her daughter using the clay and the tubes and continued it at home, because she was so engaged by the experience.

*E When parents saw the documentation they became more involved and interested/ asked more questions about what happened within their child's nursery*

*E 'I was excited by the way the project helped to make some parents and carers aware of the importance of listening to their children and allowing them to give free rein to their imaginations during play rather than directing them too closely. Paradoxically this loosening of the bonds seems to build a closer relationship based on trust and understanding which can only help a child in its quest to grow and learn.'*

*E 'The impact was impressive, at the beginning the parents had a tendency to lead play and were fretful about materials used and their children becoming messy. At the end of the project they became completely child led and becoming messy was no longer an issue.'*

*A 'At first they found it hard to understand what we were doing, but we worked with the children, and some really got on board. They started to really play alongside their children.'*

*E 'They see the effect on their children of what you do, the children enjoying themselves, and the value of it.'*

*A 'This way of working breaks down barriers between play and work, they can play as adults, there's no criticism, it's accepting.'*



The parents themselves seemed to benefit from opportunities to be playful and expressive, and developed a companionable way of working alongside their children which was mutually beneficial. They also became active in shaping the learning that occurred, rather than the recipients of a pre-planned programme., and carried the ideas developed in the sessions back into the home, scaffolding the children's learning and play.

*E 'The parents are more proactive now, they know where things are and organize themselves. It's more like a partnership.'*

*E 'The parents liked the opportunity to play themselves.'*

*E' The parents are taking the ideas more back into the home.'*

*E 'The parents are dressing the children in old clothes now for the sessions, and that's a real breakthrough.'*





## Parents response

All of the the parents commented favourably on the impact of the project. They valued the freedom afforded their children, the variety of inventive open-ended inexpensive materials made available, the learning opportunities, and the sheer pleasure of creative thinking.

*'The ability to freely play with new art ideas'*

*'All of it'*

*'Painting and creating things with different materials'*

*'How it got children to learn different things without a lot of expense'*

*'Watching my daughter enjoying herself and mixing with other children'*

*'Doing something different every week.'*

The sessions also helped the parents value their children's interests and ideas, and to play alongside them in a supportive rather than a directive way.

Having artists working with very young children was generally perceived as a benefit to the children.

The parents described the artists as

*Friendly and inventive*

*Very good with the children and showed them different ideas*

*Very friendly. B..... takes an interest in the children which is very nice. Full of different ideas.*

The parental suggestions for improvements reflect the positive response to the work.

*'Keep up the good work'*

*'Doesn't need improving'*

*'Adult chairs for pregnant ladies/elderly'*

*'Maybe put paint out for first hour only so child doesn't keep needing to be washed (chasing them round covered in paint)'*

*'Think that getting parents in after the school run at 9.15-30 would suit more, especially those harder to reach as once back home after taking other siblings to schools/nurseries, returning back out is a hard option.'*



## Artist Mentee

### *Outcomes for the mentee artist*

The mentee artist explored new roles and relationships within her practice. In particular, B experimented with adopting an open-ended, inquiring position alongside the children,, basing her practice on observation and analysis .

The project allowed a hands on approach to understanding creativity in the early years, and inspired the artist with a desire to further develop her understanding of this approach.

*'I very much enjoyed the sessions and would like to do more work with young children. I'd like to develop my practice in two ways:*

*from a practical perspective I'd like to develop a greater range of equipment and activities for children to explore and experiment with during sessions.*

*From a theoretical stand-point I'd like a greater appreciation of behavioural theory and psychology to enable me to better understand the processes by which young children learn and develop.'I now have a deeper, more fundamental understanding of the principles underpinning the work '*

## 3. Artist-educator collaboration

This section examines the role of the artist as seen by the settings and by the artists.

*Generally the partnership between artists and educators worked well. Whilst in the initial stages the educators relied heavily on the involvement of the artists to sustain the project, with the resultant possibility of the artists becoming the project, through reflection and dialogue, a working partnership developed which was more democratic.*

Having the collaboration with the artists provided inspiration, building skills in the educators and providing for an exchange of ideas.

*E 'I'll think' what can I do next?', and look back on Brenda's pictures to find ways to develop the children's ideas.'*

*'I want them (the artists) all the time, I learned loads and want to carry it on.'*

*E ' It developed our way of creative thinking, it gave us a lot of excellent ideas to use and as practitioners extend.'*

The collaboration worked best where the educators and artists shared their skills and expertise and where there was genuine openness and exchange.

*E 'We were dead open with each other.'*

*A 'The educator met us half way, it was an exchange of ideas. The more we would be together the more it would develop.'*

*E 'We bounced ideas off each other.'*

The collaboration also helped the educators develop a more reflective and facilitating approach to children's learning

## 4. Development of Provision

This section looks at the way in which being a part of the initiative has affected the day-to-day provision made for children in settings. The extracts include comments about changes of approaches to children and also on thoughts about planning and attempts to illustrate the ways in which personal and professional developments have influenced the provision for children made by the settings over the duration of the project.

*The effects of the projects in terms of change and development within the two settings was varied, but this is to be expected in what was a new and comparatively short –lived initiative. There have been mentions of the problems that arise from staff changes and by implication the problem of ownership of the project. Where staff could allocate space and time without restraint there was greater enthusiasm for the project, and so more effective . A Perhaps the most significant thing I saw was the difference that was made to the overall effectiveness of the sessions by the levels of commitment of the support staff. All of the sessions were worthwhile but..... where the support staff were especially enthusiastic and committed the difference in the success of the sessions was marked.*

Factors identified as contributing to success included continuity, training, ownership, time, commitment, staff understanding, personal effort and managerial support.

However, some very valuable changes occurred in environment, routines, and planning in each setting as a direct result of the project work.

E 'We now evaluate the types/variety of materials which are available to children.

E 'We now have a larger collection of natural resources and materials. Also we have a larger collection of re-usable materials.'



Planning for learning has become more observation- based in both settings.

By respecting the interests and capacities of the children the educators have created conditions for learning, and enhanced the learning dispositions of the children.

Educators now use children's interests and ideas and responses as starting points, rather than the usual topic-based themes.

*E We use more open-ended planning- through looking at children's interests.'*

*E 'Planning used to be a lot more structured.*

*Now I ask the children what they want to do. I want to get inside the child's head.*

*E 'I involve the children and the parents more. Now some of the parents will say 'How about trying this?' We had edible art, and the parents got everything themselves and made the instructions.'*

Where adults take children's ideas seriously in this way, rich and complex work can result, even from very young children.



*'Now I ask the children what they want to do.'*



## 5. Documentation

One of the most characteristic features of the Reggio Emilia approach is the amount of documentation kept and the use made of it for staff planning and for communication with parents.

The educators and the mentee artist remarked on the value of documentation in involving parents in their children's learning and play, and as a tool for supporting children's thinking. New skills were developed using video and sound recordings, as well as software such as - Powerpoint/ and Publisher, and new systems were introduced to share the children's play and creative opportunities..

Images were routinely used from each session as a visual memory and starting point for these very young children to develop their interests,

*E 'When parents saw the documentation they became more involved and interested/ asked more questions about what happened within their child's nursery.'*



*E' Staff team have progressed in their documenting skills since the beginning of the Sightlines project, using a variety of ways on a regular basis such as tape recordings and video clips as opposed to sole use of written observations and photographs.'*

*E ' We are now more aware of the importance of documentation.'*

*E 'By sharing documentation it allows staff and parents to develop a more accurate understanding of children's learning over a broad spectrum.'*



## 6 Conclusion

The evaluation demonstrates very positive outcomes for the children in the project. They experienced greater opportunities for developing creative thinking, and demonstrated levels of autonomy, focus and engagement and self-confidence and self-esteem.

For the adults involved in the project, the issue of change and evaluating practice was challenging, but despite some difficulties, the project did make a positive impact on practice and provision. Areas have been identified which might contribute to greater success in future projects- namely: continuity, training, ownership of the values behind the project, and managerial support.

Working collaboratively with artists helped open-minded staff to develop and change. Educators were able, through the experience of working in this way, to see their own practice from another perspective that encouraged them to question existing practice.

It is clear that educators artists and parents/carers all deepened their understanding in many areas; about reflective approaches to teaching and learning, about working collaboratively, the power of open-ended materials, and about following and understanding the children's learning journeys.

For the mentee artist, the project provided an opportunity to develop a new understanding of creativity in the early years, and has inspired an interest in building this expertise further.

The strand of activity concerned with parental involvement proved effective. The facilitating approach of the adults, seminars, workshops and close documentation all served to increase parental involvement and understanding.

However, change does take time to take root, and this initiative could be developed and supported further by involving the participating adults in ReFocus, the regional network of artists and educators inspired by the Reggio Approach.

*E ' I want to incorporate ideas into sessions, and also to allow some sessions to be unplanned, to allow the children to explore.'*



## Sustainability and Future plans

This section focuses on the aspirations of the project participants for future developments and considers the possibilities for extending the project further in the district.

If the initiative could be supported further, then the adults involved in Playful Beginnings—educators and mentee artist-, could deepen their understanding and develop their skills in the following areas.

- explore their own values (e.g. image of the child)
- develop emergent lines of inquiry
- further explore active listening
- develop documentation to make learning visible
- further develop the creative reflective cycle;
- further research the impact of enabling environments
- deepen understanding and exploration of The Hundred Languages of Children.

This ongoing professional development would consolidate the learning from the initial project work, and could be used as a tool to develop reflective practice in other settings.

One of the project educators is interested in presenting the 'Playful Beginnings' project narratives to the wider SureStart community and to promote the development of a local network of reflective practitioners.

In the same setting, the educator-artist team have already hosted visits from other children centre staff during the project sessions to share the learning of the group.

*E 'I want to develop this way of working with older children, the 5-12 year olds. I've used the same materials with them and really seen the difference.'*

*E ' I want to incorporate these ideas into sessions, and to allow some sessions to be unplanned, to allow the children to explore.'*

*E 'I want them (the artists) all the time! , I learned loads and want to carry it on.'*

Within the northern region, ReFocus, an active group of early years professionals and creative enablers have been developing this approach to early years creativity since the first showing of the Hundred Languages Exhibition in 1997 , and could usefully provide a forum for a learning network in east Durham.

The work of this group is used as an exemplar to the broader education community by Department for Children Families and Schools, the Foundation Stage Directorate and the QCA, and could benefit the early years community in the district by mentoring and support.

# Appendix





# Project description

## **‘Playful Beginnings’ Project Description**

### **Intelligent Materials**

The Playful Beginnings Project has an additional focus of involving parents in the learning journeys of their children.

Central to this approach is the idea of providing an innovative learning environment for the children, shaped by the use of recycled, open-ended materials. These ‘intelligent materials’ have the characteristic of encouraging the children’s investigations and explorations, they do not impose a direction, but pose questions and invite experimentation.

By inviting parents to collect these safe, simple and flexible materials, and then to observe the play, learning and investigations that result, parents and carers can be helped to see the value of non-prescriptive playthings, and to adopt a more facilitating approach to their children’s play. This use of recycled materials also provides an important message about giving another life to cast off objects and so has further environmental benefits.

### ***This action research project has the following areas of activity***

- Continuing professional development sessions with the educators to establish shared understandings and vision and values at the outset of the project
  - The lead artist residency sessions
  - Mentoring trainee artists
  - Creative resourcing-the materials budget permits the artist to resource the project with open-ended recycled materials
  - Documentation -The documentation budget covers the cost of producing the ongoing record of the project narratives- photographic and text materials- as a tool for supporting the children’s thinking, sharing the work with parents, carers and others, and informing the evaluation.
  - Mentoring the project- supporting artists and educators in their action research
- Evaluation-to produce a summative evaluation which makes explicit the children’s understandings and experiences , and also the role of the creative enabler- both artist and educator- in supporting the children’s thinking

*The 'Playful Beginnings' Project belongs to the family of early years creativity projects developed by Sightlines Initiative since 1997.*

The Fantastic Attic children's Exploratorium project at the Discovery museum, Newcastle, 6th June - 7th July 2000.

The Rising Sun Woodland Pre-school Project. An outdoor environmental project with under 5's from September 1998 to 2001.

The Young Children's Creative Thinking In Action Project. A three-year programme of work, supporting children's creative explorations, building new ways of working between artists, educators and children. 1998-2001 (This project involved 45 Early Years settings).

The 'Creative Foundation' 10 x educator and artist collaborations early years settings in Tyne and Wear 2001 - 2004

The Magic Wardrobe 2002 – Children's Exploratorium – Nuns Moor Play Centre-SureStart East, Newcastle

Floor Four 2004 – Children's Exploratorium – Discovery Museum – Sure Start Westgate, Newcastle

Frameworks for Creative Learning 2005 – SureStart Westgate, Newcastle

These creative collaborations between artists, children and teachers are characterised by the following basic principles.

### ***Basic principles***

Using the model of the 'reflective & creative cycle', artists and educators work together to support children in their exploration, communication and creative expression of ideas.

Unique creative projects emerge through this process, and structures, ideas, skills, media and provocations will be offered to the various groups of children who are engaged in the project activities.

Appropriate expressive media will be employed to enable children to engage with their ideas in many different ways.

**Observation** – artists and educators will spend time watching and learning about the children's interests, energies, ideas and inter-relationships;

**Reflection & Analysis** – they will discuss and analyse their observations, looking for evidence of high engagement in ideas and exchanges amongst the various individual and groups of children;

**Interpretation** – they will make hypotheses about the nature and the particular potential of particular interests. They will also make hypotheses about possible 'external' foci that they might invite the children to become interested in, following an observation phase.

**Creative Resourcing** – they will resource and facilitate the growth and development of the various emerging project ideas with offerings from appropriate media, organisation of space and time, and reflective, guided facilitation, which maximises the potential for the children to develop and express their ideas.

This methodology is multi-cyclical, and will necessitate regular re-visiting. Regular documentation (visual and written note-taking) is a basic tool of this process. This documentation will also provide material for exhibition, exchange with parents and others, and summative evidence/evaluation.

## Project Partners

Mentoring the artists and educators will be Sightlines staff who are

- External to projects

Have working involvement/understanding of children's learning/development issues and project principles.

The mentor will encourage exploration of the following areas

- Commitment as individuals to children's fascinations
- Search for the qualities of environments of enquiry
- Everyday researchers
- Focus on the pedagogy of listening
- How to engage with children and each other

How to use many expressive languages

## Contracts and Commitments

## Settings

During the first meeting, the group will agree a *contract of involvement* which will then be formalised and available as evidence of involvement to interested parties such as local authorities. This will include agreement to the basic principles, the development over time of appropriate working principles and practices, and commitment to the professional development programme. Some suggestions for discussion are:

Continual monitoring plan to contribute to the project evaluation at the end. Project mentors record key issues and key experiences.

It will be required for all participating settings to think about Documentation systems: They will have to make time to discuss things. How can you change your systems to manage time better.

It will be a condition for all participating teams to make review notes at the end of each artist's session. This will help in the monitoring process and also the evaluation at the end of the project.

## Artists Brief

*The atelierista is a studio worker, an artisan, a lender of tools, a partner in a quest or journey. In this way you are a maker, but maybe more richly you are an enabler, someone who will attend to others in their creation, their development and their communication of knowledge.* Veia Vecchi in *The Hundred Languages of Children*

1. Nurture personal awareness of 'the image the child as an innate and creative knowledge-builder and explorer';
  2. Commitment to working as a creative facilitator and developing professionalism in this area;
  3. Be able to participate in the project for the necessary duration;
  4. Be ready to develop the necessary relationships with the group of educators;
- Utilise and offer your personal media skills and dispositions as appropriate;



1. Develop awareness of the particular dispositions amongst the children (c.f. multiple intelligence –H. Gardner; hundred languages – L. Malaguzzi), and offer appropriate opportunities and contexts in which the children can develop their interests and expressivity;
  2. Work in collaboration with the educators when engaged directly with children, when reflecting and planning;
  3. With the educators and children, look for opportunities for emerging project development;
  4. Avoid a blanket, 'delivery' approach - constantly bear in mind the individuality and connectedness of the children;
  5. Preparation or resourcing forays are generally to be made outside the session times;
  6. Ensure current police vet registration, either directly or through SightLines Initiative;
- Unlike your educator colleagues, you will not be in loco parentis within the situation of the early childhood setting.

### ***Professional Development***

The intention is that the lead artist will support and mentor the trainee artists, offering opportunities through shadowing and participating in the reflective sessions to develop an understanding of the role of creative facilitator.

The new work by Harvard/Reggio Children *Making Learning Visible* is recommended as a basic reference point.

### **Organisational and aesthetic assessments**

At the beginning of the collaborations, the artist/educator teams will conduct a survey of the environment in which they and the children will be working, with a view to improving its function in supporting creative engagement and expression.

# Parent Handouts

# **Playful Beginnings**

## **All about the project**

During 2006-7, Horden, Easington and Blackhall Children's Centres are developing Early Years Creativity Projects.

The aim of these projects is to support the development of children's creative thinking.

Supported by artists Malcolm Smith and Brenda McDermott, the children are encouraged to explore, experiment and develop their ideas. The children's own interests and fascinations are used as the starting points for the project. Through closely observing the children, these interests can be discovered, even amongst the very youngest in the group who have not yet acquired spoken language.

For example, some of the children are interested in dens, in exploring enclosing, or circularity, and the adult team offer the children different ways to develop these rich learning opportunities.

The children will work with materials which help them shape their thinking-clay, water, construction, light and shadow, and other expressive media.

The work is closely documented through notes and photographs to make the children's learning visible.

# Learning Through Play

No toys are essential, either for a child's development, or for them to have fun. But some toys are much better than others.

The golden rule is: don't think about what a toy can DO; what really matters, is what a child CAN DO WITH IT.

## Simple playthings

We would like you to help us collect simple and safe, open-ended playthings for your children to explore at Learning through Play sessions. Do you have any of these things in the back of your cupboards? Or can you collect natural materials when you're out on walks with your little ones?

- Paper- cardboard, corrugated cardboard, tetra pack cardboard, rolls of paper, Easter egg wrapping paper

Metal- metal wire, chains, pipes, mesh, small drums, bun tins

- Wood- corks, plywood, wicker, blocks, planks
- Cordage- rope, string, lace, jute, ribbons, elastic
- Textiles- fabrics, accessories, colour swatches
- Plastic- tubes, boxes, pipe fittings, funnels, springs, containers, circuit boards, film canisters,
- Food containers
- Plastic bottles
- Conkers
- Shells
- Large pebbles
- Leaves
- Lengths of fabric- terry towelling
- Muslin
- voile
- Feathers
- Tissue paper
- **Cardboard boxes of all sizes**
- Bubble wrap
- String
- Ribbon
- Bun papers
- Cellophane
- Steamers
- Baskets for storage



We will use these materials to create new environments for your children to explore, and photograph and record their play and experiments for you to share.

Simpler toys mean the imagination has to do more work, and natural materials stimulate the senses.

Too many toys?

'Too many playthings can restrict development....children get overwhelmed and over stimulated and cannot concentrate on any one thing long enough to learn from it. Too many toys mean children are not learning to play imaginatively.'

Remember playing with the cardboard boxes rather than the presents at Christmas time??

One nursery packed away all the toys and left the children with tables, chairs, blankets and their initiative.

The children turned the tables and chairs into dens, and became absorbed in make believe games. They became more imaginative and contented, and learned to concentrate better and integrate better in groups.

## Resource List

Here are some of the materials which we find useful to offer to children. Most can be found thro' educational supplies, or Ikea, Children's Warehouse (scrap store in Ncle), flea markets, charity shops, Wilkinsons, B&Q, on the beach or wood, gardens or your cupboards at home.

### **Consumables**

Paper –various sizes, thickness, density

Crayons

Pencils

Fine liners

Pastels

Oil bars

Acetate pens

Acetates- to draw on

Acetates –to print on

### **Storage**

Ikea trays

Baskets

Ikea wheeled containers

Ikea see through containers- lovely for storing cellophane by a light source

Clear jars for collections and transporting- (childrens warehouse)

Message boxes (ikea)

### **Natural Materials**

Clay

Wire

Pebbles

String

Shells

Feathers

Flowers

Fruit and vegetables

Leaves and foliage

Large whicker baskets( ikea)

Sm whicker balls (ikea)

**Construction**

Off cuts of wood

Blocks with holes drilled through

Dowelling

Bamboo

Withies

Wooden blocks

Ramps

**For fixing**

Masking tape

Gaffer tape

String

Crochet hooks

Blu tak

Glue sticks

**Den building**

Cardboard boxes

Clothes horses

Muslin

Voile

Blankets

Rubble sheets

Bubblewrap

Cellophane

Fixing materials- see above

tubes

Carpet tubes

Tumble drier tubes

See through pipes from plumbing suppliers

Steps

Small step ladders

Stool steps (ikea)

Wind up stools (ikea)

### **Baby gym**

Make your own from an Ikea table trestle (£6) –needs to have the shelf removed from the bottom, and holes drilled in the bar at the top

### **Dressy ups**

Open-ended materials-

Fabric lengths (Blaydon factory shop)

Lycra

Wrist bands

Plain masks

Sashes

Wings (part shops/joke shops)

All sorts of shoes

Bags

Handbags

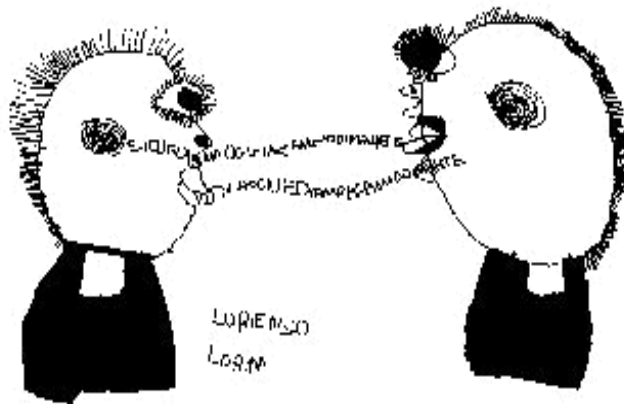
Face paints for the children to use themselves

# Continuing professional development



## Playful beginnings

### Introductory session 3.30-5.30pm



"I call it 'the word bridge' because the words go from one mouth to another. I talk to him and he talks to me. A word bridge makes the children know each other who don't know each other, it makes them friends, and it makes them argue too, if the words are ugly." Lorenzo, 4

### 3.30 Welcome and Introductions

#### Looking at Reggio

### 4.15 Shared visions— an exercise

- The image of the child
- Creative thinking in action

### 4.45 What makes a good project? Or Where does an idea go?

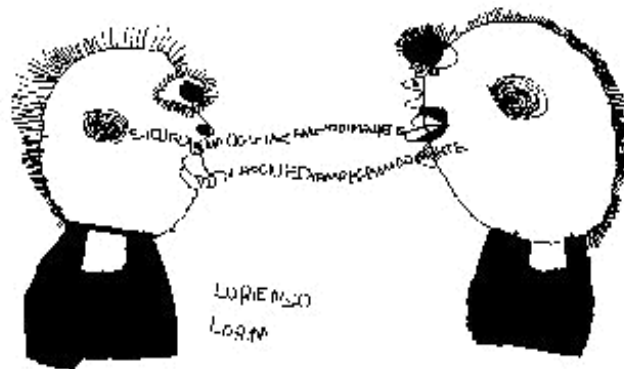
A pre school project

'Inventing together in Friendship '

### Questions and answers

## Playful Beginnings

### Introductory session 3.30-5.30pm

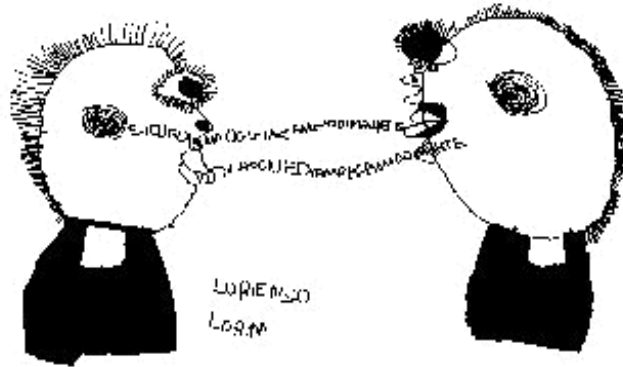


I call it 'the word bridge' because the words go from one mouth to another. I talk to him and he talks to me. A word bridge makes the children know each other who don't know each other, it makes them friends, and it makes them argue too, if the words are ugly" Lorenzo, 4

- Welcome and Introductions
- Making spaces for children -Creating 'Environments of Enquiry'
- Working with light and shadow
- Intelligent Materials –how to stimulate curiosity and imagination
- Playing with materials and feedback

## Playful Beginnings

Introductory session 3.30-5.30pm



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- Welcome and Introductions  
Meeting the artists
- Working with light and shadow— feedback
- Looking at Project work with Malcolm
- Demystifying 3d constructions
- Making spaces for children— bamboo string and cardboard
- Nuts and bolts— arranging the sessions