



CASE STUDY

Elements: Supporting creativity in Early Years settings across Somerset

Setting: Chewton Mendip Primary School

Type: Reception/Yr1 class

Teacher's name: Jess Burgess

Artist name: Richard Hughes

Artform: Visual Art/Drawing/Books

Term date: Autumn Term 1 2016/2017

Average number of children and age: ages 4-6

Average number of adults and type: 1 teacher, 2TA's, 1 student TA, 1 artist

Research question: How can we support the development of children's reflective thinking?

Activity:

We covered a large area of the classroom floor with paper. The materials would support drawing based exploration over a wide range of scales. All members of the class were able to access the activity. The open-ended activities on the paper prompted many different narratives and explorations, for example:

Ted built a house from paper and developed a narrative involving two horses who lived inside the house.

Laura started to draw a tree lined river which over the sessions grew longer and longer.

During the initial session, Harry, who had previously not shown an interest in engaging with mark-making started to draw frenziedly. Before this session, we had watched Harry become immensely challenged by the task of learning to form a specific letter on a whiteboard in a phonics group activity.

He talked excitedly to himself as he drew, – "They're digging for treasure. Harry started to draw a very large "H" on the paper. He then told me, "I'm covering the H up, so it's safe from

monsters.” Harry draws over the “H’. “The H explodes so we have to cover them up.” The drawing is now very fast and very large. “Blue smoke.....maybe a man’s digging underground and there’s some blue smoke. This is the smoke – it’s telling him where to put out the fire.” The narrative went on as Harry described it in a non – stop stream of consciousness. Jess, the teacher expressed some surprise at Harry’s excited drawing.



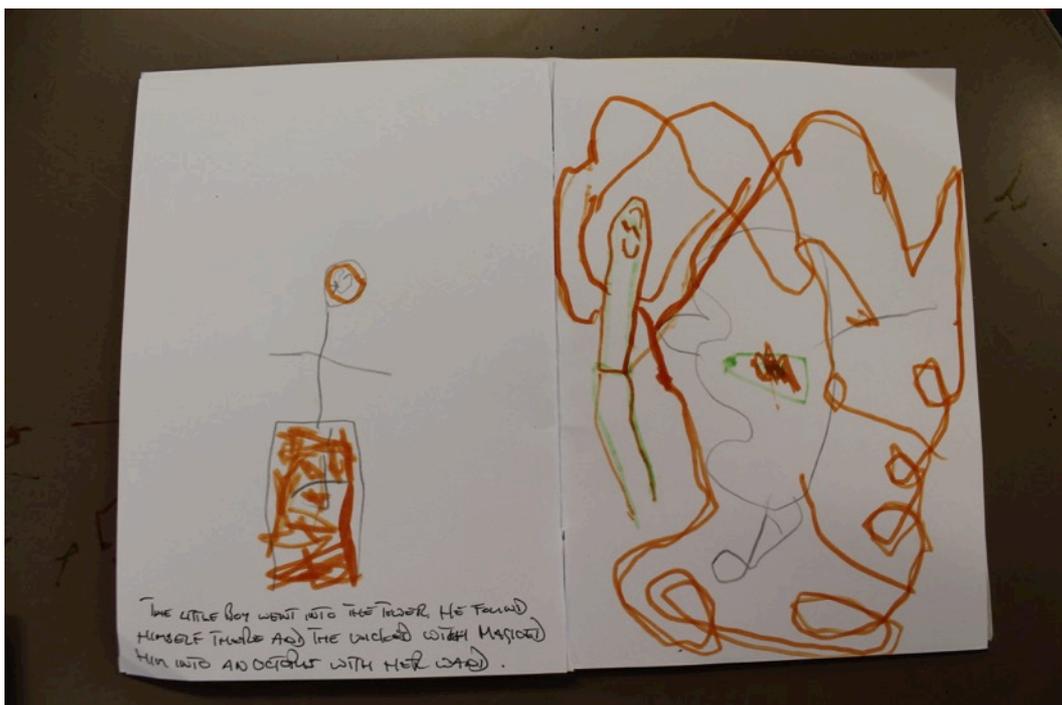
As the sessions progressed, children continued to be very involved in their own creative processes; for example, Laura diligently continued to work on her river and riverbank trees that soon ran the length of the paper.



Gradually ideas and themes formed across the group. Towers and bridges started to be drawn and built - the surrounding areas were drawn, map-like. Narratives developed which encompassed themes around Rapunzel and evil witches.



We started to work in books that we made. This gave the children the opportunity to move away from the shared forum of the paper on the floor to a more individual process. The narrative suggested by the series of empty pages seemed to encourage children to delve deeper into the subjects they were exploring.



Research findings: -

This was a mixed year1/reception class. We had decided to work with the whole class allowing children to opt in and out of the activity as part of the continuous provision on offer in the learning environment. Year 1 children were periodically taken out of the class for English and Maths work in another room. This changed the dynamic of the sessions and affected children's involvement, often cutting short someone's exploration or collaboration.

We felt a certain pressure to encourage the work to develop as much as possible within the limited time-frame of the project. This pressure meant that the integration of the project into the classroom routine was initially quite strained and clumsy but with time a more fluid and natural relationship developed between the running of the class and the project.

Having the opportunity to revisit work is a very important part of any learning process. From the beginning of the project the children were able to engage in reflective dialogue at the end of each session. However, with a week's pause between sessions, children also needed time to rediscover where they had left off and did not always draw the same conclusions or return to their reflections from the end of the previous session. With hindsight, we could have allowed more space and time for this and for the emerging ideas to develop further before trying to move on.

We started to review children's ideas at the start and end of each session with the whole class. Ideas seemed to ignite the imagination of larger parts of the group. Towers were made out of paper and stuck to large drawing. The areas around these buildings became map-like and narratives developed. The same towers, with secret underground stairs, were also being drawn.



Discussing the work as a group offered a framework for the children to explore and develop their ideas within the context of the wider group.

We showed some of the children how to make a book using no tape, glue or staples. Ongoing narratives seemed to develop from working in the books, perhaps stimulated by the series of pages on offer. A lot of the narratives developed from the previous work exploring towers, Rapunzel, stairs, underground spaces, good and evil.



Quotes:

The children were able to reflect on the project as a whole, identifying things that they are liked the most, what they had learned from the process and what they can do now as a result of it.

What did you like the most?

- working with my friend to make my tower stand up
- having Rich write in my book and I drew the pictures
- playing the instruments

What did we learn?

- I got better at drawing
- I got better at being creative
- I got better at making things

What can you do now?

- Now I like writing and making books
- I didn't like doing pictures to go with my writing but now I can do them
- I can now do the outlines of my own pictures to colour in

Conclusion:

These sessions offered the class an opportunity to work in a manner that was decided by each participant. This differed from the more structured class systems and encouraged some less confident children to engage in areas of learning that they would not normally choose.

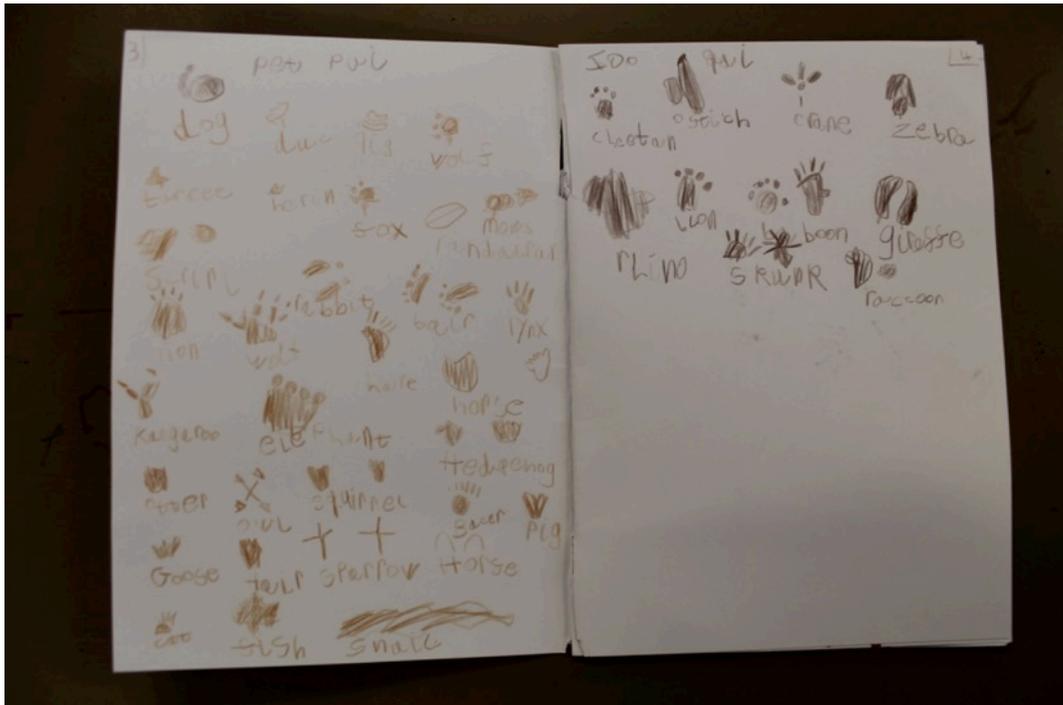
A couple of children seemed to gain confidence through involvement in creative process. Harry and Ted were both children who seemed to lack confidence in aspects of their learning at school. Ted was identified as someone who refused to mark make in adult directed activities, for example saying that he could not write/draw the letter W, yet when drawing on the large paper was easily able to do so. Working in a child led process allows children to take ownership of their work and to find their own solutions to problems. This in turn can instil a confidence in their abilities and thinking.

Ted draws a "W". Karen (student TA) told me that he was unable to do so. Later, whilst he was drawing, I asked Ted if he could draw a "W". He did so at first by copying a "W" that I had drawn but later he did so with no "W" in sight.

Working in such an open-ended manner also allows children to follow ideas freely which allows them to express themselves freely. When we worked on the paper, Laura started to draw a tree-lined river which she continued until it ran the length of the paper. This became quite a project! When we started to work in the books, Laura decided to draw the footprints of different animals and birds. With support, she researched this thoroughly on the internet and then drew each print with great precision and care.

This approach allows children to be seen for the types of learners that they are. They also get to experience this. I hope that these experiences lead to an understanding of how they learn best and therefore supports greater resilience.

We introduced the idea of making books and then working in them. This allowed the children to move the ideas that they had been exploring as part of a larger group on the paper on the floor to a more individual medium. The format of a series of pages encouraged the children to work within the framework of an ongoing narrative. This seemed to support them to explore themes further than they had previously.



We then would review the work at the start and end of each session, hoping to reflect as a group on emerging themes. This enabled us to work alongside the children asking open-ended questions and model how to develop reflective thinking skills in relation to their ideas. By the end of the project children were able to listen to each other's endeavours from the session, reflect on their own and each other's outcomes and processes and articulate how they were influenced by each other's creations and experiences