



## CASE STUDY

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*Elements: Supporting creativity in Early Years settings across Somerset*

**Setting:** Little Wellies, Wells Cathedral School

**Type:** Nursery School Class

**Lead EYP name:** Mel Thomas

**Artist name:** Richard Hughes

**Artform:** Visual Art/Drawing

**Term date:** Spring 2017

**Average number of children and age:** The whole class were able to access the session(s): ages 3-4

**Average number of adults and type:** 1 teacher, 1 or 2 EY practitioners, 1 artist

**Research question:** To what extent does an artist impact on an Early Years Practitioner's views regarding creativity (and the end product?)

### **Activity:**

We covered a large area of the classroom floor with paper. The materials would support drawing based explorations 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, explorations and developments.

On the first day, children started to draw and there were many disparate explorations side by side. Felix started to draw a "purple river" which sprung from a river that had already been a part of someone's drawing. Felix extended this and the river started to meander across the paper. Felix was very determined in drawing the river which became longer and longer as it journeyed across the paper. Felix seemed to be interested in joining line together. As the river progressed, it seemed to encompass

and join already existing lines. Felix diligently drew and coloured the river purple all morning.

At the end of the morning, Felix became interested in sticking paths of tape to the paper to make long passages around the paper.



At the end of each session, Rich and Mel would sit and discuss the session, talking about the work that was done and how this work related to children's development. We talked about how some children seemed to be becoming more confident.

When we started, the morning routine was very structured; children would arrive over a period of time and there would be breakfast and a settling period before circle time. Later, the whole class would stop for a snack. On the second session, Circle time was skipped because children had already started working on the paper and snack time was changed to be a more staggered affair so that the class could continue the momentum of the session. This change was made quite organically in response to the way that the children were working.

As children arrived at the nursery, they started working on the paper spontaneously and seemed to be more confident to try new things. Returning to the same materials allowed children to feel familiar enough to spontaneously start to respond to the materials.



Noah, whose drawings were very bold, had previously responded that he did not know what was happening with his drawing if asked. He seemed to become quite self-conscious at which point he might stop drawing.

His growing confidence was apparent as his drawings became bigger and bolder. He started to talk about what he was doing and soon other children were joining in with activities and drawings that he had initiated!

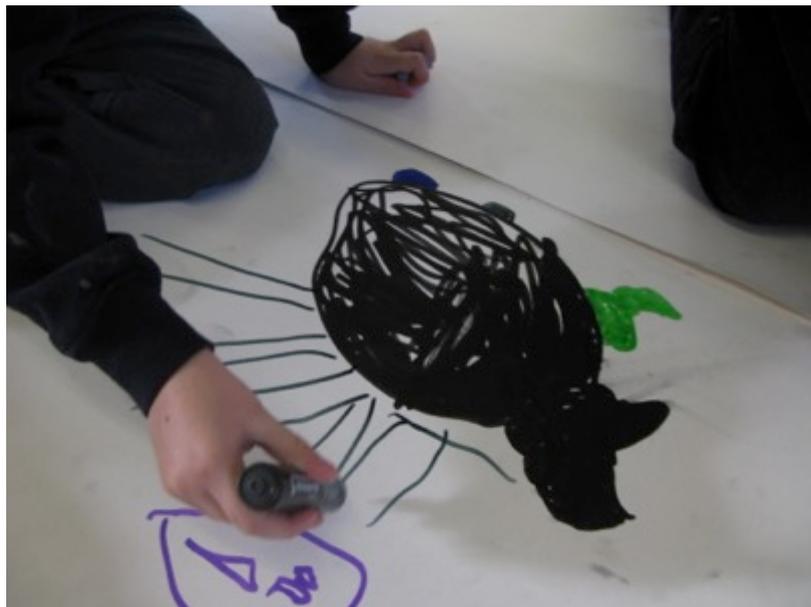
Staff noted that Noah's confidence seemed to increase through these sessions.

Noah was drawing very precisely and with great concentration. "A black egg." I ask what hatches from a black egg. "A cow." He then draws a nest around the egg and straw. Gradually, interactions about his drawing are becoming tools to aid their development.

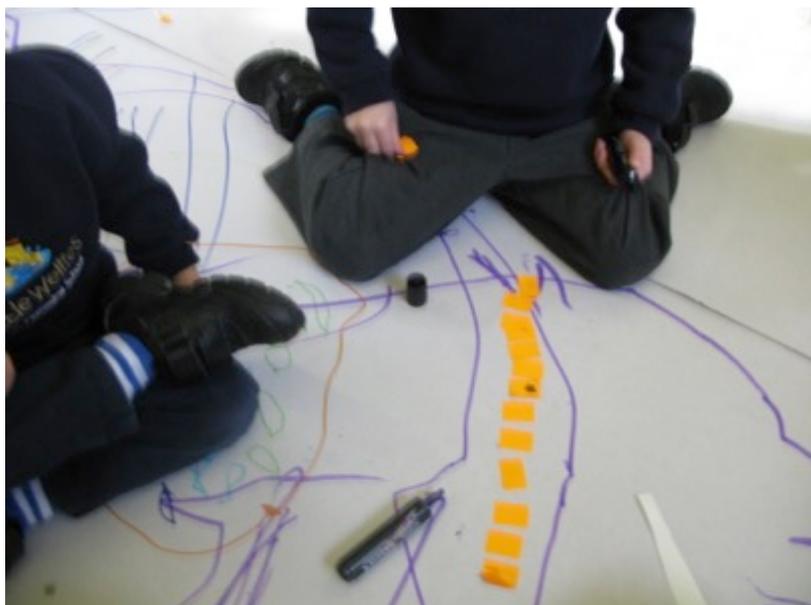


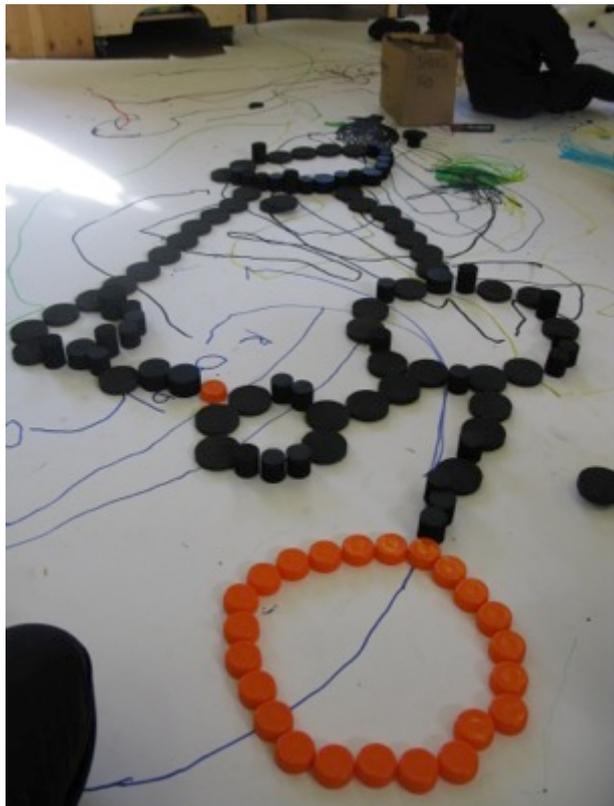
Liam and Noah started to add paper to what was already on the floor so that it led across the room to another part of the room. This demonstrates a growing confidence and involvement in an unfolding creative process. The boys also have become more comfortable and aware of the possibilities of the materials that were being used and they were able to push the boundaries (quite literally!) of the format that we were working in, in order to extend their creative explorations.

This was something that was built upon later when meandering lines were made with plastic bottle tops. Liam decided the line was going to connect the two different parts of the nursery space.



Felix continued his exploration of line and connection.





Gradually the children started to define their own explorations more as they became more confident and independent. Liam was very interested in drawing around people and did this many times, returning to this many times. He rolled out a path of paper into the other half of the room onto which he drew round a series of people, creating a river of figures. In doing this, he extended the arena in which we had been working.

I felt that this demonstrated new levels of confidence and creativity. Children seemed feeling enabled to take ownership of their own explorations and to redefine the possibilities and applications of the materials that were presented during the workshops.



Freya and Victoria became more confident as they became more familiar with the materials in the environment. They were often the first children to arrive at the Nursery and they helped me to make decisions in the setting up of the space such as covering the table with paper and where it should be placed.



They explored the space created by the paper area more and more, dancing and “swimming” around it. It was clear that they were exploring different aspects of this

new space by drawing in the space underneath the table and sticking tape round and round the perimeter of the paper, enclosing the area.





#### Research findings: -

Mel Thomas was the early years practitioner who was working closely with me on this project. At the start of the project, Mel saw herself as someone who was “product orientated”.

Mel said that she enjoyed her involvement in the project and that she had been very interested watching how children have developed and shaped their own explorations. She told us that previously, she had been concerned about not having an end product in sight. Mel told us that having Richard in the setting demonstrated the benefits of open-ended projects.

During the second session children had organically become involved in the activity as they arrived. Mel spontaneously decided to skip Circle Time as this would mean that children would have to stop and then restart. This demonstrated an understanding the process of exploration needed time and space to unfold organically.

Mel, with the other staff members also decided to change the way that snack time was administered. Normally the whole class would stop mid-morning and sit down for a snack but they felt that this would break the session and therefore children’s explorations unnecessarily, so snack time was staggered and children could pause when appropriate. This seemed to recognize very strongly the importance of children’s process.

Mel was very interested in what the children were doing and why and engaged strongly with them, discussing what was happening. We had many lengthy and in

depth discussions at the end of sessions about what children had been doing and ways that we could extend their learning. We also talked at length about ways of supporting children's explorations in an open – ended manner.



We also explored ways of communicating with the children about their work. We looked at open questioning and ways that we could allow time and space for children to find their own ways to communicate about their learning.

When asked about an example of how the experience had informed her practice and thinking, Mel said that staff had been planning to make a giant Elmer and instead of having a pre-formed idea of how to do this, children would be free to design and use materials as they wished. Mel stated that her main Learning was her role about resourcing activity and supporting children to follow their own explorations of the materials rather than planning an adult led direct outcome.

Mother's Day was approaching and Mel was determined that children should make cards in their own way rather than fit into a pre-determined format. This would allow chances for discussion with children about their process and about feelings about family.

Mel also said that learning does not have to have a pre-ordained outcome. If children are given reassurances and allowed to take ownership of their learning, they will have their own narrative supporting their process.

Mel told us that it was fascinating to watch how children communicate with Richard and the staff during the project. Schemas have been identified and this has been recorded in children's observations. This in turn has resulted in finding out more about children.

Similar resources have been used each week. Previously children might not have

had access to the same resources for such long periods of time – this allows the children to find new uses and relationships to the materials and to discover new ways of working with them. Mel has enjoyed watching them explore what they are creating each week has been different. Mel identified that she has learnt that the process is important rather than the end outcome.

Gave an example of child- Noah who has developed his confidence throughout the project and is now leading play opportunities with other children.

Richard enjoyed Mel's reflections when talking about the children's development. Mel was open to change and the debate grew deeper during the project. Mel would make very insightful observations about children and what that meant for their learning and well-being.

Mel enjoyed working alongside Richard and observing children's learning. Seeing children engaged for long periods of time in their own explorations.

### **Challenges?**

Main challenges were balancing what Richard wanted to achieve with routines for the day. Routine was that they all stopped for cafe and then all went outside. This did not give children long enough to develop and explore. Changed the routine to a rolling snack time.

Monday was the only day that the children are in the nursery space all day. On other days, the timetable is quite rigid and formal and the children go to other parts of the school for different sessions. Mel was keen to allow Mondays to become more fluid to allow greater flexibility for children's learning processes.

The activity took up quite large part of the room and so had to move some other craft activities. However children did not miss them.

### **Changes to practice?**

- have the same resources out for longer to allow children more time to discover and develop about how they can be explored
- freedom to let children enjoy the process rather than worry about end product
- Mondays will have a resource bank and will have clay out for a whole term to let children explore and see where they take it.
- helped with observations for Tapestry because find out more about children, their thinking processes and what they can achieve
- use of more open ended questioning with children
- change routines on a Monday to allow children more time for creative learning

– as shown above in regards to routines etc.

At the initial meeting, Mel told us that she was very product orientated and felt a little daunted by not having an end result to work towards. By working closely with her in an open – ended manner and communicating about the sessions helped her to feel more comfortable in supporting children’s creative learning at each moment.

Mel already had a deep and instinctive understanding of what was happening for children and this process gave her the tools to feel more confident to trust this. This allowed her to think about new and different ways to support and enable children’s creative learning in an open-ended way.